A Path from Dependent Origination to the Unconditioned in the *Diamond Sūtra*

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A PATH FROM DEPENDENT ORIGINATION TO THE UNCONDITIONED IN THE DIAMOND SŪTRA

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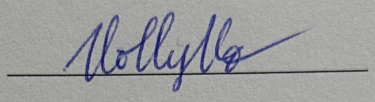

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May any merit from this study contribute to the preservation and transmission of the Dharma at Sakya Buddha University. May all living beings have the opportunity to encounter the Dharma.

Abstract

A Path from Dependent Origination to the Unconditioned in the *Diamond Sūtra*

Holly Vo

This thesis is a hermeneutic and applicative study of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (*Diamond Sūtra*). While existing scholarship primarily situates the sūtra within the *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus—as a condensed summary of larger texts—and mainly discusses key themes such as emptiness (*śūnyatā*), skillful means (*upāya*), and logic, this study takes a different approach. Motivated by the contradictions of contemporary life, where intellectual advancement coexists with deepening conflict and alienation, this research seeks to uncover a practical, liberating path within the *Diamond Sūtra* that begins in the conditioned world and leads toward the unconditioned perfection of wisdom.

Grounded in the principle of dependent origination and framed by the traditional Buddhist model of the threefold wisdom (*śrutamayī*, *cintāmayī*, and *bhāvanāmayī prajñā*), the study conducts an integrated analysis: textual examination, contemplative reflection, and case-based application. It argues that the essence of the *Diamond Sūtra* offers a path through which practitioners cultivate serene faith, transform suffering into wisdom, and progressively transcend conditioned phenomena through the practice of non-abiding giving. Thus, the study investigates the sūtra's semantic structure, essential teachings, doctrinal coherence with early Buddhism, its applicability in modern society, its practical distinctiveness among Mahāyāna texts, and its role in the continuity of the Buddhist teachings. Ultimately, this thesis aims to affirm the *Diamond Sūtra* as a living, self-salvific means for sincere practitioners to awaken amidst adversity, recognize the pure essence in living beings, and radiate discernment into the world.

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1 Chapter 1: Introduction

The *Diamond Sūtra* has been an influential discourse in Mahāyāna Buddhism for thousands of years. The Sūtra opens the gate to the Perfect Enlightenment and establishes the foundation for meditating traditions in East Asia. Practitioners understand the *Diamond Sūtra* by direct life vicissitudes and can be self-salvific upon discerning of a phrase in the discourse. Despite its boundless potential, there is a lack of coherent systematic analysis of its profound meanings for contemporary practice, particularly concerning its faithful text and the core teachings in Early Buddhism.

This thesis aims to address this gap in a bidirectional exploration. One is to connect the Sūtra back to the essential discourses taught by the Buddha. Second is finding a practical path departing from the contemporary mundane world toward the ultimate liberation through the essence of the Sūtra. This introductory chapter will further discuss the overview of the *Diamond Sūtra*, research problem, objective, scope of the research, implications, methodology of the research, and a brief literature review of the Sūtra.

1.1 Overview of the *Diamond Sūtra*

The *Diamond Sūtra*, with the original name of *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*, is a Mahayana Sūtra, arranged in the system of *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras. It was first interpreted into Chinese directly from Sanskrit at the beginning of the fifth century by Tripiṭaka Master Kumārajīva, a Kuchin monk whose prolific translations became the foundation for exegetical traditions in China. The Sūtra consists of approximately three hundred verses (*śloka*) and is accordingly known as *Triśatikā Prajñāpāramitā*. The sūtra was divided into thirty-two chapters

by Prince Chao-ming (501-531) with chapter titles. Since then, the division was referenced by later commentaries and translations among scholars and practitioners.

While being widely known as *Diamond Sūtra*, its original name means the perfection (*pāramitā*) of wisdom (*prajñā*) that cuts off (*√chid*) like the diamond thunderbolt (*vajra*). The question of what it cuts off should be clarified at the end of this thesis. However, the thesis initially assumes that the object of cutting off is delusion.

1.2 Research Problem

The central focus of this research, titled *A Path from Dependent Origination to the Unconditioned in the Diamond Sūtra*, is to identify within the essence of the *Diamond Sūtra* a practical path that is grounded in the conditioned world and steadily leads practitioners toward the unconditioned. This inquiry is motivated by contemporary human conditions in which, despite the tremendous advances in intellectual and technological achievement, the unceasing pursuit of material gain and conceptual domination continues to generate conflict, alienation, and widespread suffering among living beings.

In response to these conditions, this research turns to the core teachings of the Buddha and proposes a threefold exploration of the *Diamond Sūtra* that reflects the traditional progression of wisdom: learning (*śrutamayī prajñā*), reflection (*cintāmayī prajñā*), and cultivation (*bhāvanāmayī prajñā*). This exploration is structured as follows: (1) an analysis of the Sūtra's essence based on its authentic textual transmission and overall meaning, (2) an inquiry into the deeper implications of that essence through the interpretations of experienced practitioners, and (3) the application of the Sūtra's core teachings to a case of real-life suffering in contemporary society.

Grounded in the conditioned world and guided by the principle of dependent origination, this thesis draws on the essence of the *Diamond Sūtra* to present a practical path—examined through textual study, contemplative analysis, and experiential case analysis—that cultivates serene faith, transforms suffering, and steadily leads practitioners toward the unconditioned.

1.3 Objectives

The discussed contemporary conditions and the lack of a coherent, systematic analysis of the *Diamond Sūtra* call for a renewed investigation of the text as a practical guide to liberation. Based on the principles of dependent origination, this thesis undertakes a hermeneutic and applicative study of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (*Diamond Sūtra*). Its primary objective is to identify a practical, salvific path within the text that cultivates tranquil confidence (*śraddhā*), facilitates the transformation of *duḥkha*, and progressively guides practitioners toward both lived liberation and ultimate liberation (*parinirvāṇa*).

To fulfill this overarching aim, the study first clarifies the authentic form of the *Diamond Sūtra* through a critical review of scholarly contributions and textual witnesses. It then examines selected English translations alongside the reconstructed text from the perspectives of doctrinal interpretation and practical application. This process aims to provide a coherent summary of core meanings, highlight the overall semantic structure, articulate the essential message of the sūtra, and elucidate its foundational connection to the principle of dependent origination.

The thesis next investigates the philosophical essence of the sūtra at the verse level, drawing from early Buddhist teachings and the interpretative insights of influential commentators such as Vasubandhu and Hui-neng. Based on this analysis, the study articulates the distinctive practicality and internal coherence of the *Diamond Sūtra* as a transformative text.

Finally, the research applies these insights to a case analysis of real-life suffering, framed by the Four Noble Truths, to demonstrate how profound affliction can serve as a catalytic starting point for spiritual transformation. Taken together, these objectives aim to present the *Diamond Sūtra* not merely as a philosophical scripture, but as a coherent and actionable guide for both immediate and ultimate liberation.

1.4 Scope of the Research

This study focuses on the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (*Diamond Sūtra*) as a Mahāyāna scripture, yet it does not seek to draw a rigid boundary between Mahāyāna and early Buddhist teachings. Accordingly, the study does not examine the historical development of Buddhist schools or explore the wide-ranging interpretations derived from the *Diamond Sūtra* across traditions. Nor does it attempt to exhaust the extensive commentary tradition. Instead, it situates the Sūtra within foundational Buddhist philosophy and selectively engages with insights from key figures such as Vasubandhu and Hui-neng to illuminate its practical relevance for contemporary readers. In connecting with the Buddha's core teachings, the study refers to parallel passages from the Āgama Sūtras and their corresponding counterparts in the Nikāya.

From a linguistic standpoint, the literature review and subsequent textual analysis are limited to first-hand translations of the *Diamond Sūtra* based directly on the original Sanskrit text. The sole exception is the use of Kumārajīva’s Chinese in its Sino-Vietnamese pronunciation due to limited access to Classic Chinese. Although the study frequently refers to the original Sanskrit to clarify ambiguous phrasing in primary translations, philological analysis and translational critiques are not in the scope of this research.

On the practical side, the study applies the teachings of the *Diamond Sūtra* to a case of real-life suffering, analyzed through the framework of the Four Noble Truths. However, it does

not aim to construct a generalized psychological or sociological model of suffering. Rather, it emphasizes practical, spiritual transformation toward the supramundane, as framed in Buddhist philosophy generally and in the Sūtra in particular. The aim is not to reduce the *Diamond Sūtra* to a therapeutic tool, but to demonstrate its value as a coherent and transformative guide to liberation — beginning in conditioned existence and culminating in the realization of the unconditioned.

From a supramundane perspective, this study recognizes Perfect Enlightenment—attained by the historical Buddha (Prince Siddhārtha) approximately 2,600 years ago—as the ultimate spiritual goal. However, a detailed exploration of this realization and other advanced attainments lies beyond the scope of the present research. Instead, the thesis centers on the practical path leading toward that goal. While acknowledging that the journey to ultimate liberation may span many lifetimes (*jīva*), this study focuses on how the present life serves as the active field of practice. The past is regarded as a wellspring of inherited wisdom, the future as the aspirational culmination, and the present as the locus for progressing on that path and experiencing its transformative effects in contemporary society.

1.5 Research Questions and Implications

This study is guided by a set of research questions that emerge from both the textual challenges and the lived implications of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (*Diamond Sūtra*). These questions aim to uncover the soteriological structure, doctrinal uniqueness, and practical applicability of the sūtra's core teachings.

1. What is the true essence of the *Diamond Sūtra*?
2. What is the uniqueness of the liberating path in the *Diamond Sūtra* among Mahāyāna doctrines?

3. Why did Elder Subhūti express concern about “serene faith” in future beings upon hearing the sūtra?
4. How can the non-abiding liberating path outlined in the *Diamond Sūtra* be sustainably pursued in the chaotic contemporary life?
5. What role does the *Diamond Sūtra* play in the continuity of Buddhist teachings?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to provide both doctrinal clarity and practical insight into the transformative potential of the *Diamond Sūtra*. It highlights the sūtra’s relevance for contemporary spiritual life by articulating how suffering can serve as the starting point for serene faith, how wisdom cuts through conceptual and existential obstacles, and how non-attachment enables the realization of the unconditioned. The implications extend beyond textual understanding, offering a living framework of liberation rooted in Buddhist philosophy—capable of guiding practitioners through suffering toward transcendence. Lastly, the study seeks to consolidate serene faith in the practitioner, making the liberating path in the *Diamond Sūtra* both accessible and sustainable in modern life.

1.6 Author’s Background and Motivations for the Work

The author was first inspired by reading a children's storybook about Prince Siddhartha’s four journeys—encounters with aging, illness, death, and the path of renunciation—and by watching a biographical film about the Sixth Patriarch of Chan, Hui-neng, who began his path of awakening upon hearing the phrase “abide nowhere” from the *Diamond Sūtra*. These early experiences led the author to perceive Buddhism as a historical and logical source of truth, as well as a practical guide for encountering life’s challenges. With further life experience and study of Buddhist teachings, the author has recognized a common thread in all Buddhist teachings, connecting mundane existence with awakening and liberation. The extensive focus on

the concept of emptiness in contemporary discussions of the *Diamond Sūtra* raised the author's hypothesis that through its intricate teachings lies a practical path to the ultimate liberation. This question serves as the primary motivation for the present thesis.

1.7 Methodology and Methods

1.7.1 Methodology

This thesis employs three interrelated methodologies to guide its structure, analysis, and practical application.

1.7.1.1 Methodology of the Iterative Threefold Framework of Wisdom

This research adopts a layered hermeneutic approach, guided by the classical Buddhist framework of the threefold wisdom: (1) *śrutamayī prajñā* — wisdom derived from hearing or textual study; (2) *cintāmayī prajñā* — wisdom derived from reflection; and (3) *bhāvanāmayī prajñā* — wisdom derived from meditative cultivation.[1] These sources of wisdom are not approached sequentially, but as an iterative and interdependent process.

Textual understanding does not arise solely from reading; it inherently involves reflection and experiential engagement. Critical reflection requires lived experience as its foundation, while direct experience in turn deepens one's comprehension of textual teachings. Therefore, this thesis adopts a model of mutual critical correlation, in which each form of wisdom continually informs and reinforces the others.

This interdependent framework serves as the epistemic and structural foundation for the thesis. Specifically, Chapter 2 engages in textual analysis of original text and translation, correlating with doctrinal insight. Chapter 3 reflects on commentarial insights from experienced practitioners and correlates doctrinal reflection with lived spiritual concerns. The case analysis in

[1] Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, 1991, 3:912.

Chapter 4 demonstrates how the sūtra's teachings can guide spiritual transformation in real-world adversity, where deeper comprehension of the teachings arises through direct experiential engagement.

1.7.1.2 Methodology of Textual Analysis

According to McKee, textual analysis is a methodology of collecting information and selecting the most likely interpretation at three contextual levels: (1) the internal coherence of the text, (2) the genre-specific conventions that shape its discourse, and (3) the broader cultural and practical contexts in which it is received and applied.[2] This approach enables the researcher to identify the most plausible interpretations of a text within its layered settings. Applying this methodology, Chapter 2 involves a close reading of the first-hand translations of *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* alongside a focused review of key scholarly sources. Engaging primary translations based directly on the reconstructed Sanskrit text, Chapter 2 analyzes the Sūtra (1) as a whole, focusing on the overall semantic structure and essential meanings, (2) within its genre as a Mahāyāna sūtra aimed at guiding practitioners through the perfection of wisdom, and (3) in relation to its practical circulation as a text designed to function within the conditioned world, offering a pathway to liberation.

This methodology is further applied throughout the thesis, following a funnel approach. The analysis begins broadly in Chapter 2, with an overall examination of the *Diamond Sūtra* from scholastic and doctrinal perspectives to identify its core essence. In Chapter 3, the focus narrows to an analysis of essential teachings, correlated with key commentarial insights and reflections on contemporary spiritual concerns. Drawing on these underlying meanings, Chapter

[2] McKee, "A Beginner's Guide to Textual Analysis."

4 delves into a focused case analysis designed to deepen experiential understanding through the practical application of the sūtra's teachings.

1.7.1.3 Constructive Methodology

Beyond analysis, the study constructs a three-stage practical framework of Faith–Transform–Transcend distilled from the *Diamond Sūtra* to articulate the phenomenon-driven mental flow in Chapter 4. Serene Faith (*śraddhā*) is the initial confidence rooted in direct suffering to varying degrees in daily life. Transformation is the stage in which suffering is transmuted into wisdom. Transcendence is the phase of moving beyond conditioned phenomena through the practice of giving. This constructive framework is drawn from and validated through the case analysis of the *Diamond Sūtra*, illustrating how the mind evolves from duḥkha toward liberation in a process grounded in practical experience and doctrinal insight.

1.7.2 Methods

To support the above methodologies, five research methods of (1) critical evaluation of primary sources, (2) translation clarification and sūtra summary, (3) contextual doctrinal grounding, (4) review and integration of commentarial insights, and (5) case analysis are employed.

1.7.2.1 Critical Evaluation of Primary Sources

Critiques of the reconstructed original texts are systematically assessed. Key translations and their critiques are critically compared and verified against the corresponding original Sanskrit text where available, with attention to historical context and interpretive intent, in order to identify the strengths and limitations of each primary source.

1.7.2.2 Translation Clarification and Sūtra Summary

When ambiguities in all primary translations are identified—particularly where a translation may mislead practical engagement with the sūtra—a direct translation from the original Sanskrit is conducted, informed by practical experience and doctrinal insight. Drawing from the identified strengths of each primary source, and supplemented by the author's partial translations of key phrases, the sūtra is summarized in a manner that preserves its original structure and essential phrases for further analysis following Chapter 2.

1.7.2.3 Contextual Doctrinal Grounding

This study applies a method of contextual doctrinal grounding, wherein selected discourses from the Āgama and Nikāya collections are referenced to clarify and support the interpretation of the *Diamond Sūtra*, as well as to guide practical application. This method emphasizes continuity in foundational principles—such as the Four Noble Truths and dependent origination—without undertaking a direct comparative analysis. These early texts provide a doctrinal lens that reinforces key insights in the *Diamond Sūtra*, while remaining faithful to its Mahāyāna context.

1.7.2.4 Review and Integration of Commentarial Insights

Selected Mahāyāna commentarial materials on the *Diamond Sūtra* are critically reviewed and synthesized, with a focus on sections directly addressing key doctrinal and interpretive concerns. Commentaries in Vietnamese are read directly by the author, while sources in other languages—primarily Chinese—are consulted with the aid of translation tools where necessary. These insights are evaluated against corresponding phrases in the sūtra to assess doctrinal consistency and clarify interpretive intent. Supplementary commentarial sources are referenced

where relevant to provide broader doctrinal context and enhance the interpretive depth of the study.

1.7.2.5 Applied Case Analysis of Adversity and Transformation

The final method consists of a practical case analysis illustrating the application of the sūtra's liberating path in a real-life scenario of adversity. The case presents an instance of intense suffering—depicted through a scenario of confinement and relational distress—and examines how such affliction can serve as a motivation for spiritual transformation. The analysis is framed by the Four Noble Truths and interpreted through the thesis's proposed threefold progression: (1) gradually cultivating serene faith (śraddhā) in the midst of duḥkha, (2) transforming suffering through analytical insights, and (3) transcending attachment to the conditioned by non-abiding giving toward the realization of the unconditioned. This experiential method serves to demonstrate how the *Diamond Sūtra* can function as a living text that facilitates liberation through both reflection and direct engagement with suffering.

1.8 Review of Primary Sources

According to the Taishō Canon, the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (hereafter *Vajracchedikā* or *Diamond Sūtra*) belongs to the collection of Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, the Buddhist discourses on the Perfect of Wisdom in the Mahāyāna Tripiṭaka.[3] There are seven direct Chinese translations from Sanskrit by six scholastic monks and their monastic communities, arranged in T235-239 of volume 8 and T220 of volume 7 in the Canon as follows[4].

1. Kumārajīva (401), Diamond Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra [金剛般若波羅蜜經], Vol 8, No. 235.

[3] "Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō 《大正新脩大藏經》."
[4] English titles in the list have been translated by the author.

2. Bodhiruci (509), Diamond Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra [**金剛般若波羅蜜經**], Vol 8, No. 236[5].
3. Paramārtha (562), Diamond Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra [**金剛般若波羅蜜經**], Vol 8, No. 237.
4. Dharmagupta (605), Diamond Cutter Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra [**金剛能斷般若波羅蜜經**], Vol 8, No. 238.
5. Xuanzang (648), The 9th Section of the Great Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra: The Diamond Cutter [**大般若穆**罗**蜘多**经**第九会能断金**刚**分**], Vol 7, No. 220, Scroll 577.
6. Yi Jing (703), Diamond Cutter Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra Expounded by the Buddha [**佛**說能斷金剛般若波羅蜜多經], Vol 8, No. 239.

Among the various translations of the *Diamond Sūtra*, Kumārajīva's rendition, dated to 401 C.E., is the earliest known, although no corresponding Sanskrit manuscript has yet been discovered. The oldest extant printed copy of Kumārajīva's version, dated to 868 C.E., has been found without an accompanying Sanskrit text.[6] Nevertheless, the *Diamond Sūtra* must have been disseminated prior to the 4th century, as evidenced by the extant commentaries of Asaṅga (ca. 320–390)[7]and Vasubandhu.[8] Kumārajīva's translation has served as the authoritative version for centuries across China, East Asia, and Vietnam, forming the foundation for its study, practice, and preservation to the present day. In Vietnam, this translation has circulated in Latinized phonetic Sino-Vietnamese since the early 20th century. Since the 21st century, numerous translations into modern Vietnamese and English have emerged; however, most are indirect or only loosely faithful to Kumārajīva's original text. Despite this proliferation, it is now rare to

[5] Bodhiruci translated two recensions - T236a and T236b.
[6] IDP, "Printed Copy of the Diamond Sutra Translated by Kumārajīva Dated to 868."
[7] Asaṅga, "Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitāsūtraśāstra."
[8] Vasubandhu, "Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitāsūtraśāstra."

find editions preserving both the Classical Chinese and Latinized phonetic Sino-Vietnamese versions, as exemplified in the commentary by Venerable Master Thich Huyen Chau.[9]

During the colonial period, as interest in Eastern Buddhist texts grew, Western scholars began restoring the Sanskrit text of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and translating it into modern European languages. Among them, Max Müller was the first to reconstruct the original text in 1881.[10] His work was later supplemented by other scholars upon the discovery of two incomplete manuscripts – the Stein manuscript from Central Asia, around 500 C.E., and the Gilgit manuscript from North Pakistan, dating from the 6th or 7th century. Drawing on all available references and sources, Edward Conze rendered a direct translation from Sanskrit to English in 1957—a version that became the standard reference for scholars.

In 2006, Harrison published the newly discovered manuscript in the Schoyen collection, presumably originating from the Bamiyan area in Afghanistan and dated to the 6th to 7th century.[11] For the purposes of this project, we can confine our research to English language materials. By combining this with the Gilgit manuscript, Harrison was able to reconstruct a complete Sanskrit text of the Sūtra, which "must have circulated in the "Greater Gandhara" region, i.e. roughly the area covered by the modern Afghanistan and Pakistan."[12]

Therefore, this thesis relies on three primary first-hand translations of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* to examine the essence of the original discourse in English in Chapter 2: (1) the earliest translation by Kumārajīva,[13] (2) the most influential direct English translation by

[9] Thich Huyen Chau, *Dẫn Vào Tâm Kim Cang*.
[10] Müler, *Buddhist Texts from Japan*, 1:1–46.
[11] Harrison, "Resetting the Diamond: Reflections on Kumārajīva's Chinese Translation of the Vajracchedikā."
[12] Ibid
[13] Kumārajīva, trans., "《金剛般若波羅蜜經》 Diamond Sūtra."

the European scholar Edward Conze,[14] and (3) the most recent direct English translation by the contemporary American scholar Paul Harrison, based on a complete reconstructed Sanskrit text.[15] As an exception, Kumārajīva's Chinese translation is additionally employed through its Sino-Vietnamese pronunciation,[16] serving as a verifiable supplement due to limited proficiency in Classical Chinese.

1.9 Chapter Outline

The thesis is structured into five chapters. The Introduction serves as a roadmap for the entire exploration as aforementioned.

Chapter 2 traverses the history of scholastic efforts to establish an authentic version of the *Diamond Sūtra*, and accordingly extracts its core summary, structural features, and its doctrinal foundation in dependent origination.

Chapter 3 explores the underlying philosophy embedded in the essential teachings of the Sūtra through the integration of scriptural interpretation and experiential commentaries, and examines the applicability of these teachings in contemporary praxis.

Chapter 4 elucidates the practical application of the Sūtra's essential teachings through a case analysis of adversity framed by the Four Noble Truths. To deepen intuitive understanding, it investigates direct experience through a proposed framework consisting of cultivating serene faith, transforming suffering, and transcending conditioned phenomena. From this, it extrapolates a universally accessible starting point for all practitioners on the path toward liberation.

[14] Conze, *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā, Edited and Translated with Introduction and Glossary*.
[15] Harrison, "Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā: A New English Translation of the Sanskrit Text Based on Two Manuscripts from Greater Gandhāra."
[16] Thich Huyen Chau, *Dẫn Vào Tâm Kim Cang*.

Chapter 5 synthesizes the three levels of analysis—textual study, contemplative insight, and experiential application—from the previous chapters to address the research problem in relation to its initial questions. It then discusses the broader implications for Buddhist studies and contemporary spiritual life, and concludes with reflections on the study's limitations and directions for future research.

2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 is organized into two sections**.** The first section examines the original text and first-hand translations, tracing the history of scholastic efforts to establish an authentic textual foundation for the *Diamond Sūtra*. The second section correlates primary translations with doctrinal insights to produce a summary of the sūtra that preserves its semantic integrity and essential doctrinal phrases, providing a basis for further contemplation and practical application.

2.1 The State-of-the-Art of Finding Authentic Text of the *Diamond Sūtra*

The scripture period of the Chinese Buddhist canon started with the preparation stage, spanning from the 1st to the 5th centuries. During this initial chaotic stage of the emerging Buddhism in China, scriptures were mostly transmitted from Central Asia and India and translated without verifying the completeness and consistency of the original manuscripts.[17] The first Chinese rendition of *Diamond Sūtra*, translated by the scholastic monk Kumārajīva, emerged during this period and has remained the dominant version in Mahāyāna countries of East Asia for over sixteen centuries—despite the absence of its companion Sanskrit manuscript. Consequently, although it has exerted a strong influence in East Asia—as evidenced by findings in Dunhuang[18]—many Western scholars have consistently questioned the accuracy and fidelity of Kumārajīva's translation relative to the Sanskrit text. Specifically, critics contend that the translation shortens the text, not refer to a Sanskrit original, shows little concern for literal accuracy, and has exerted an unusual influence on subsequent translations.[19]

[17] Guangchang, Zi, and Wu, "Defining the Chinese Buddhist Canon," 12.
[18] Harrison, "Resetting the Diamond: Reflections on Kumārajīva's Chinese Translation of the Vajracchedikā."
[19] Conze, *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā, Edited and Translated with Introduction and Glossary*; Harrison, "Resetting the Diamond: Reflections on Kumārajīva's Chinese Translation of the Vajracchedikā."

With the recent construction of the first complete Sanskrit text of the sūtra from two incomplete manuscripts found in the ancient Greater Gandhara, the region historically associated with the Buddha's teachings, Harrison has attempted to compare this text with the translation work of Kumārajīva's and reassess previous scholarly judgments regarding his work. The thesis will discuss these researchers in chronological order, with overall evaluations and findings toward the end of this section. Drawing on these evaluations, this section reviews the literal fidelity of these two main lines of translated sūtras in order to extract reliable sources of core meanings for further study and practice.

2.1.1 The Initial Reconstruction of Sanskrit Text in Buddhist Modernism

In 1881, the German-born British scholar Müller realized the necessity of returning to the Sanskrit original to fully capture the true essence and transcendent wisdom of the Vajracchedikā.[20] Thus, Müller restored what he regarded as the first authentic Sanskrit text via comparative method through a careful collation of three independent classes of sources received from contemporary colleagues and monks. Among these, there were two manuscripts from Japan, printed texts from China, and a Tibetan block-printed edition from China. Müller observed an overall consistency among these sources, noting that they all exhibited "what seem to be mere useless repetitions".[21] Though identifying a notable variation that the Japanese text generally gives "an independent and shorter form" compared to its Chinese and Tibetan counterparts, Müller did not consider this discrepancy significant, as he believed "some Chinese

[20] Müler, *Buddhist Texts from Japan*, 1:15–18.
[21] Ibid., 1:17.

translators, such as Kumārajīva, shortened the Sanskrit text of the Buddhist Sūtras in their translations".[22] The Sanskrit text was also translated in English by Müller.[23]

Since its publication, Müller's edition has served as the foundational reference for Western scholars studying the *Diamond Sūtra*, offering a faithful reproduction of the Sanskrit text. In a French translation, Harlez compares Müller's version with Kumārajīva's Chinese translation and the Manchu version. He observes that Kumārajīva's version introduces notable variations, including additional passages, which differ from Müller's critical edition. Thus, Harlez suggests that these differences might stem from variations in textual sources or different interpretations within the Buddhist traditions.[24] However, Müller's Sanskrit text reconstruction and evaluation of early Western scholars in the late 19th century initiated the scholastic expansion of the *Diamond Sūtra* to the Western countries. As Dharma Master Kumārajīva and his contemporary saṅgha took the pioneering role of translating the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, among 384 fascicles of Buddhadharma, and expanding key Mahāyāna scriptures in East Asia,[25] Müller and his colleague paved the first foundation of understanding the *Diamond Sūtra*, one of the most important Mahāyāna sūtras in the West.

2.1.2 The Rising Concerns of Original Text Reconstruction and Faithful Translations

Substantially based on the Sanskrit text reconstructed by Müller, Conze (1957) refines it by incorporating additional older sources.[26] Beyond the late sources Müller employed, Conze draws on a range of supplementary texts and manuscripts, including Kumārajīva's Chinese translation, the commentaries of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, the Chinese translation by

[22] Ibid.
[23] Müller, "The Vagrakkhedikâ or Diamond-Cutter," 109–44.
[24] Harlez, *Vajracchedika; Prajñaparamita. Traduite deu texte Sanscrit avec comparaison des versions chinoise et mandchoue*.
[25] McRae, "Kumārajīva."
[26] Conze, *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā, Edited and Translated with Introduction and Glossary*, 1–15.

Dharmagupta, the Khotanese version (from the 8th-10th century), an incomplete manuscript from Eastern Turkestan (circa 500 C.E., edited by Pargiter),[27] and the Gilgit manuscript (from the 5th–6th century). This diverse array allows Conze to identify and correct textual variants—such as discrepancies in vocabulary, omissions, and repetitions—and to reconstruct a more faithful Sanskrit reconstruction. Simultaneously, he provides a direct English rendition of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* from the refined Sanskrit edition, aiming to preserve the most faithful meaning of the original text.

While examining the sources, Conze identifies several deviations between them and the reconstructed Sanskrit text. Specifically, the manuscript edited by Pargiter differs from Müller's text by omitting "stereotyped phrases and redundant repetitions." The Gilgit manuscript is "even more sparing of unnecessary repetitions than the Pargiter's," and the Khotanese source is "much shorter than the Sanskrit text."[28]

On the other hand, when comparing the earliest source of the *Diamond Sūtra*, translated by Kumārajīva, with the reconstructed Sanskrit text, Conze asserts that Kumārajīva's translation "throws little light on the problems of textual criticism." He observes that Kumārajīva has a "habit of elucidating his translations," as seen in his rendering of "apratiṣṭhitaṁ cittam" as "pure, translucent thought." Unlike Müller, who generally notes Kumārajīva's tendency to shorten texts, Conze critiques it for being "not made directly from a Sanskrit original" and "less concerned with literal accuracy than Tibetan translations." Conze acknowledges several uncertain discrepancies, where Kumārajīva's translation is more elaborate than Müller's—such as "amahākāyaḥ" instead of "akāyaḥ" at §17e and "vajraprajñāpāramitā" instead of

[27] It is mentioned as Stein manuscript, discovered by Sir Aurel Stein in 1900 and identified as a copy of Vaj by A. F. Rudolf Hoernle in 1903 before being edited by Pargiter, according to Harrison and Watanabe (2006).
[28] Conze, *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā, Edited and Translated with Introduction and Glossary*, 3–4.

"prajñāpāramitā" as the sūtra's title at §13a.[29] However, Conze claims that "many of the verbal differences, abbreviations, and omissions" are more reflective of Kumārajīva's translation methods than a divergent Sanskrit original.[30]

For clarification, the Gilgit manuscript of the Vajracchedikā (hereafter G) that is referenced by Conze's edition was discovered in northern Gilgit, Pakistan, in 1931, edited twice in 1956 and 1959.[31] After Conze, Vaidya also utilized the edited Gilgit manuscript to improve Müller's text in another edition.[32] However, the full integrity of reconstructing the Sanskrit original was not demonstrated in the resulted text until the third edition of the Gilgit manuscript by Schopen. He evaluates the manuscript as "one of the most carefully written of the Gilgit finds," representing the literary style and language history of the 6th–7th century. In light of this, Schopen notes two reasons for the new edition of the Gilgit manuscript, offering critical warnings to contemporary philological scholars.[33]

First, Schopen emphasizes the necessity of removing excessive errors and distortions in the first two editions to return to the manuscript's original correctness avoid replicating editorial errors in subsequent editions. The second reason is to stimulate critical investigation and revision of other editions of the text, for instance, Conze's influential edition.[34]

Schopen further critiques the "high degree of arbitrariness" in Conze's editorial procedures, specifically the haphazard selection of different recensions with widely varying dates, unstated alterations, and inconsistent omissions of passages in Müller's edition, which Conze initially declared as the substantial text. For instance, when refining Müller's Sanskrit

[29] Notes for readers: amahākāyaḥ (lack of a giant body) vs. akāyaḥ (lack of a body) at §17e; vajra-prajñā-pāramitā (the perfection of wisdom as a diamond thunderbolt) vs. prajñā-pāramitā (the perfection of wisdom) at §13a;
[30] Conze, *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā, Edited and Translated with Introduction and Glossary*, 1–2.
[31] Harrison and Watanabe, "Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā," 91.
[32] Schopen, "The Manuscript of the Vajracchedikā Found at Gilgit."
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 95–96.

text, Conze transcribes “na mama bhagavan duṣkaram” at 14b, although Müller’s three sources and edition read “āścaryam.”[35] Conze does not justify the alteration or attribute the change to Pargiter’s manuscript or Kumārajīva’s translation. He omits an entire passage at the end of 17c of Müller’s edition, which is not found in Kumārajīva, Pargiter, or the Tibetan text, but retains other passages at 13e and 14a, even though they are not found in these three sources or the Gilgit manuscript. Observing such arbitrary editorial practices, Schopen raises the critical concern that the resulting text could become a “personal document” if each editor held the authority of excluding passages that contradicted what he believed to be “the whole of Buddhist tradition” or “the tradition of the Prajñāpāramitā.”[36]

In response to these issues, Schopen provides the exact transcription of the Gilgit manuscript, without making corrections to grammar or syntax, but with detailed notes to signal errors and silent alterations in the previous editions, and the corresponding English translation of the manuscript (not the entire *Diamond Sūtra*) for broader reference. Through Schopen’s aim of improving editorial methodology, the author of this thesis believes that reconstructing an ancient Buddhist sūtra for its original content is indeed an intellectual exploration journey that is conditioned by an initial wholesome desire of knowing true facts, sustained by patience and integrity, and incrementally developed by appreciative discrimination on collected data, variations, and prior uncertainties to aim toward clarity and fidelity. On such a challenging path, the more practice, the more confidence is cultivated.

Back to the critical question on the faithfulness of the first Chinese translation of the Vaj whether Kumārajīva shortened text in his translation as Müller explicitly accused and Conze

[35] Notes to readers: “na mama bhagavan duṣkaram” (It is not difficult for me, O Lord.) in Conze’s constructed Sanskrit text is similar to Kumārajīva’s but his declared sources reads “āścaryam” (how wonderful!).
[36] Schopen, “The Manuscript of the Vajracchedikā Found at Gilgit,” 96–97.

implied in the conclusion of not being "made directly from a Sanskrit original," the author believes that these accusations are nullified by three counter points. First, the exemplar which Kumārajīva used to produce his translation is undefined. Secondly, Pargiter and Schopen realize the tendency of brevity in the old extant Sanskrit manuscripts before the 7th century. Lastly, as Müller and Conze favor longer texts in later reeditions, their critic of shortening text toward Kumārajīva is no longer objective.

2.1.3 Scholarly Contributions, Evaluations, and Findings in the 21st Century

In 1999, a Vajracchedikā manuscript was identified in a sizeable set of Buddhist manuscript of Schoyen collection, a private manuscript collection spanning over five thousand years from the whole world. The Schoyen manuscript of Vajracchedikā (hereafter the Schoyen manuscript or S) was found in caves near the Bamiyan valley in Afghanistan. After the initial transliteration, reconstruction, and analysis by Watanabe on the Schoyen manuscript, Harrison and Watanabe collaborate to publish the edited text from 21 birch bark folios of the manuscript with its English translation. By referencing back to the full text edited by Conze, the two scholars evaluates and observes that S covers approximately 60% of the full text, from §1 to §16c, the Gilgit manuscript (G) spans 13b-14e and 15b-32b, and the Pargiter (P) scatters in sections 2-4, 10b-16c, and 17b-32b. From the linguistic aspect, S is close to G. In term of content, its readings are very tally to those of P, G, and Kumārajīva and generally shorter and less standardized than Conze's recension. Particularly, "it is evident that S is the manuscript closest in content to P," the oldest extant Sanskrit manuscript (circa 500 C.E.), according to Harrison et al., and P "fairly close to the Chinese translation by Kumārajīva (401 C.E.)," according to Pargiter.[37]

[37] Harrison and Watanabe, "Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā."

By noticing the similarity of the two overlapped manuscripts S and G in terms of philology, origin, format, and time, Harrison systematically reconstructs a full Sanskrit text of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, representing the *Vajracchedikā* that circulating around the 6th century between today Afghanistan and Pakistan, near the ancient Greater Gandhāra. Specifically, the first half of text was covered the Schoyen, up to 16c, and the second half by the Gilgit manuscript, from 17a to 32b.[38]

Accordingly, Harrison offers the direct English translation of the *Diamond Sūtra* from his full Sanskrit rendition. With the best effort to balance between moving away from "the unnatural style which has become the standard in English translation of Buddhist texts," and "reflecting as accurately as it can the distinctive phrasing and brevity of the two Greater Gandhāram exemplars," he offers a freer translation than Conze toward non-specialized readers. Similar to other Western scholastic translators, such as Conze, and Schopen, Harrison realize the underestimated difficulty of translating the original Sanskrit text to English and the need of supplementing the translation with his interpretations in footnote. In the perspective of translating, Harrison points out the tendency of "amplifying formulaic passages or spell things out in full" in the later recensions among versions of text predated to the 7th century, including three Sanskrit manuscripts, P, G, and S, and early Chinese renditions by Kumārajīva, Bodhiruci, and Paramārtha.[39]

In a later article, Harrison reflects deeper on Kumārajīva's Chinese translation of the *Diamond Sūtra* with respect to other evaluations from Western scholars through the path of

[38] Harrison, "Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā: A New English Translation of the Sanskrit Text Based on Two Manuscripts from Greater Gandhāra."
[39] Ibid., 135–40.

deriving the original text of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* since 1881.[40] He evaluates that Kumārajīva's translation is more than a simple linguistic act; it is a doctrinal and philosophical endeavor that reflects the linguistic and cultural challenges of rendering complex Buddhist teachings into Chinese. Therefore, although agreeing with Conze on the observation that Kumārajīva's translation is characterized by his "habit of elucidating his translations," Harrison realizes that it is an interpretative approach to make the text more accessible to Chinese audiences. This method, however, sometimes led to sacrifices in literal fidelity to the Sanskrit in favor of conveying the text's doctrinal essence.

On the other hand, Harrison critiques earlier scholars like Max Müller and Edward Conze, who judged Kumārajīva's translation by comparing it to less accurate Sanskrit editions rather than appreciating it as an interpretative masterpiece. According to Harrison, Kumārajīva's translation is not a flawed rendering, but an example of "Chinese Buddhist understanding" of the sūtra's core teachings. He contrasts the brevity and conciseness of Kumārajīva's Chinese version with newly discovered Sanskrit manuscripts, revealing how the translation was influenced by doctrinal priorities rather than strict textual fidelity.

In term of translating, Harrison questions the influence of Kumārajīva's translation in China and East Asia, despite subsequent translations and more accurate Sanskrit versions. Harrison points out two conspicuous phenomena that should be improved for clarity. First is "the use of the Chinese word xiang 相 (feature, mark, form, appearance) for at least two terms in Sanskrit, namely saṁjñā and lakṣaṇa" in Kumārajīva's translation.[41] The author agrees on the necessity of discriminating saṁjñā (perception) from lakṣaṇa (sign). Clearly, by rendering the

[40] Harrison, "Resetting the Diamond: Reflections on Kumārajīva's Chinese Translation of the Vajracchedikā."
[41] Ibid., 241.

phrase “是諸眾生無復我相”[42] as “for these living beings no longer have any perception of a self” rather than “for these living beings no longer have any sign of a self,” its meaning is straightforward. It should be noticed that lakṣaṇa means "xiàng" (相) and saṁjñā means "xiǎng" (想) in Chinese, and these two words sounds very similar, especially for such a non-native Chinese translator as Venerable Kumārajīva.

Secondly, Harrison realizes the intermittent missing of words in some cases of the prominent affirmation-negation-affirmation verses. The author notices that these typographical errors were not only amended by Venerable Xuanzang in his translation as identified by Harrison, but also edited in most of later reprints of Venerable Kumārajīva’s translation by descendent Buddhist monastery saṅgha, including the English translation of its woodblock print.[43] Hence, besides indicating by Dharma Master Kumarajiva as the translator from Sanskrit to traditional Chinese, a solemn reprint of a *Diamond Sūtra*, with typographical error fixes, generally acknowledges the reference of other translations before the sūtra’s context.[44] The dominance of Kumārajīva's translation and its editions indicates the gratitude from Buddhists to the Three Jewels, particularly to the pioneer saṅgha who spread the Buddhist sūtra eastward, translated, interpreted, and passed down to the current generation.

The author appreciates the effort of deriving the original text of the *Diamond Sūtra*, detailed syntactic analysis, and evidence-based justifications of contemporary scholars. Such diligent, objective scholastic work narrows the sixteen-century gap and the geographical, cultural, and linguistic distance from the Greater Gandhara through China toward the Western countries.

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[42] Pinyin: Shì zhū zhòngshēng wú fù wǒ xiāng, refer to Harrison, “Resetting,” p. 240. Also refer to Thich Huyen Chau, p. 62-63 for Chinese and coresponding Sino-Vietnamese: “Thị chư chúng sanh vô phục ngã tướng.”
[43] IDP, “Printed Copy of the Diamond Sutra Translated by Kumārajīva Dated to 868.”
[44] An example can be found in Thich Huyen Chau, *Dẫn Vào Tâm Kim Cang*, p. 10.

2.1.4 Conclusion on Original Sanskrit Text and Translations of the *Diamond Sūtra*

In summary, it took approximately 125 years (1881–2006) for contemporary scholars to reconcile extant Sanskrit manuscripts and reconstruct a reliable Sanskrit text of the *Diamond Sūtra*, believed to have circulated in Greater Gandhāra around the 6th–7th century—about 100 to 200 years after Kumārajīva's first translation. Based on this reconstructed text, regarded as the most authentic version available, Western scholars have effectively mirrored the efforts of Dharma Master Kumārajīva sixteen centuries earlier: translating an ancient text into a living language. Moreover, in striving to maintain fidelity to the original while adopting a natural linguistic style, modern Western translators reflect two characteristic patterns of the ancient monastic translators of the *Diamond Sūtra*: (1) referencing and building upon preceding translations, especially the earliest versions, and (2) employing interpretative strategies in translation to convey the sūtra's meaning across cultures and languages.

Based on scholastic findings, evaluations, and acknowledgements, it can be concluded that the three selected primary sources of the *Diamond Sūtra* are congruent in structure and major content, despite a tendency toward brevity in the older versions. Each source can be referenced for its respective strengths. The rendition by Dharma Master Kumārajīva is the oldest extant translation, noted for its brevity and known typographical errors, which have been corrected in later reprints, including its representation in Sino-Vietnamese used in this study and in the English version provided by the International Dunhuang Programme. Conze's English translation, representing the longest version, closely follows Sanskrit syntax to preserve original meanings, despite relying on a Sanskrit text constructed from an arbitrary selection of manuscripts. Harrison's translation, based on a reliable Sanskrit text reconstructed from the oldest extant manuscripts, balances natural English style with accuracy and conciseness.

Therefore, the sūtra will be summarized in the next section, drawing primarily from Harrison's English translation and its accompanying Sanskrit text[45]—using the first half (§1–16c) from the Schoyen manuscript edited Harrison and Watanabe,[46] and the second half (§16d–32) from the Gilgit edited by Schopen[47]—for scholarly reliability. Additional reference will be made to Kumārajīva's Chinese rendition for its interpretive value,[48] and to Conze's English translation for its strict adherence to Sanskrit syntax.[49] This summary is intended to support further contemplation and practical application.

2.2 Correlation of Translation and Interpretation

Having identified the strengths of the three key primary sources and established the methodology for synthesizing an interpretive summary in the previous section, this section correlates key translations and the reconstructed Sanskrit text with Buddhist doctrinal insights to present a summary of the *Diamond Sūtra*. Intended to serve as a referential basis for further study and practice, this summary faithfully preserves the original structure of the sūtra, including its traditional division of thirty-two chapters, and retention of essential phrases and sentences. Ambiguously translated passages that affect contemplation and practice are retranslated from the original Sanskrit text by the author, with corresponding explanations provided in footnotes and further discussed in the Chapter 3. Accordingly, this section explores the overall semantic structure of the sūtra and its connections to Early Buddhist teachings.

[45] Harrison, "Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā: A New English Translation of the Sanskrit Text Based on Two Manuscripts from Greater Gandhāra," 142–59.
[46] Harrison and Watanabe, "Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā," 112–32.
[47] Schopen, "The Manuscript of the Vajracchedikā Found at Gilgit," 99–107.
[48] Kumārajīva, trans., "《金剛般若波羅蜜經》 Diamond Sūtra"; Thich Huyen Chau, *Dẫn Vào Tâm Kim Cang*.
[49] Conze, *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā, Edited and Translated with Introduction and Glossary*, 65–92.

2.2.1 Summary of the *Diamond Sūtra*

Among 1250 bhikṣus, Elder Subhūti respectfully asks the Buddha regarding how those who have set out on the bodhisattva path should stand, proceed, and control their minds (§1–2). The Buddha says they should produce the following mind:[50] 'All living beings must be completely liberated[51] by me to Nirvāṇa. Yet, although I have completely liberated countless living beings, no living being has been completely liberated.' Why? If in a bodhisattva the perception of a being, a lifespan, or a person may arise, he should not be called a bodhisattva (§3). Furthermore, giving should be done by a bodhisattva who does not abide anywhere—not in forms, sounds, scents, tastes, touchable, or mind-objects. Thus, a bodhisattva should give so that he may not abide even on the perception of signs. The merit of a bodhisattva who gives without attachment is immeasurable—like the immeasurable space in any of the ten directions (§4). The Tathāgata[52] should not be seen via the possession of marks because the possession of marks, which is told by the Tathāgata, is indeed not a possession of marks. As long as there is a mark, there is illusion. Accordingly, the Tathāgata must be seen through non-mark among marks (§5).[53]

Then Elder Subhūti asks the Buddha whether, in a future time, there will be any beings who, upon hearing such a discourse, will give rise to true understanding.[54] The Bhagavat

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[50] "evaṁ cittam utpādayitavyam" is rendered in active voice as "should produce a thought in this manner" in Conze's translation, "should have the following thought" in Harrison's. The author interprets it as "should produce the following mind" to indicate the stream of thoughts in practice.
[51] Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary: pari-nir-√vā (2) | parinirvāpayitavyā (gerundive): must be completely emancipated
[52] Tathāgata means "one who has thus gone" (tathā-gata) and/or "one who has thus come" (tathā-āgata).
[53] Disagreeing with Conze and Harrison's translations, the author renders "through non-mark among marks" for lakṣaṇālakṣaṇataḥ (lakṣaṇa-alakṣaṇa-taḥ *ablative*) accordingly to the substantive- substantive karmadhāraya case of man-tiger ("a tiger among men" or "a man like a tiger") in Ruppel, *The Cambridge Introduction to Sanskrit.*, p. 139.
[54] bhūtasaṁjñā: except Conze's translation as "perception of the truth," all English and Chinese translators render by "true belief," according to Red Pine, p. 141. The author renders "true understanding" because saṁjñā means "perception" or "understanding" but not "belief," according to Monier-Williams, M. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*.

confirms there will be Great Bodhisattvas,[55] fulfilled with discipline, virtue, and insight,[56] having served many Buddhas, having wholesome roots planted under many Buddhas. These bodhisattvas, who, when hearing these words, will attain serenity even in a single thought, will be cognized by the Tathāgata. They will produce and accumulate immeasurable merit. The perception of a self, a sentient being, a lifespan, or a person will not occur in them. Neither will a perception of the Dharma nor a non-Dharma.[57] Neither will a perception nor a non-perception. Why? If a perception of the Dharma or a non-Dharma should occur to these bodhisattvas, that perception would become grasping to a self, a being, a living being, and a person. Indeed, neither the Dharma nor a non-Dharma should be grasped. Therefore, the Tathāgata says that even the Dharma should be abandoned by those who understand the Dharma discourse like a raft—how much more so non-Dharma (§6).[58]

In turn, the Buddha asks Elder Subhūti and confirms the true understanding through his responses such that there is no dharma realized by the Tathāgata as the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment[59] or expounded by the Tathāgata because that Dharma is ungraspable, ineffable, and unconditioned. Thus, Buddha-dharmas, that are called "Buddha-dharmas," are indeed not Buddha-dharmas (§7–8). The being who attains the fruit of Stream-enterer, Once-returner, Non-returner, or Arhat does not raise the perception that 'by me the fruit has been attained," otherwise, that being would grasp at a self, a sentient being, a living entity, and a person (§9).

[55] Conze and Harrison translated bodhisattva mahāsattva as "bodhisattva and great beings" but the author agrees with Red Pine that bodhisattva is modified by mahāsattva and realizes that mahāsattva is translated an attribute of bodhisattva in Kumārajīva's rendition. Refer to Red Pine, p. 59.
[56] As X-vat means "having X," Conze and Harrison translated "gifted/endowed with X." Harrison: "... who will be endowed with moral conduct, good qualities, and insight." Yet the author renders "fulfilled with" for the underlying cause-and-effect between practice and the manifestation of these characteristics.
[57] The author renders "dharma" as the Dharma taught by the Buddha, not a phenomenon, and this choice is self-explained via the simile of the raft at the end of §6. Likewise, "adharma" is non-Dharma, what is not taught by the Buddha.
[58] Like Conze, the author assumes "iti" is missing in the reporting syntax.
[59] Kumārajīva renders "Anuttarā Samyaksaṃbodhi" as-is, and Conze render by "the utmost, right and perfect enlightenment."

Likewise, all perceptions are illusory. One who has set out on the bodhisattva path should know and have faith in all phenomena; but he should have faith in such a way that even the perception of a phenomenon does not occur. In short, the conditioned should be seen as like an illusion, a bubble, or a dream (§10–32).

2.2.2 Overall Semantic Structure of the Sūtra

According to Conze's chronological survey, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, dated to 100 BCE), is the oldest text among the collection of Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras compiled in volumes 5–8 of the Taishō. This foundational text was later expanded into longer versions of up to 100,000 verses, posing challenges to later generations due to its sheer length and abstract thought. In response, condensed sūtras embodying Prajñāpāramitā philosophy, such as the *Diamond Sūtra* of 300 verses, were composed to address these difficulties. Moreover, Conze contends that the *Eight Thousand Lines* was composed by "poets" or "novelists," drawing from earlier sūtras, and that the text's formulaic opening, "Thus I have heard," merely alludes to its attribution to the Buddha.[60]

By implication, such claims raise indirect doubts regarding the authenticity of the *Diamond Sūtra*, which is considered a later distillation of the *Eight Thousand Lines*. While this section focuses on a structural and contextual analysis of the text, the question of authenticity will be revisited in response to the final research question in the concluding chapter of this study.

Based on the three-layered methodology of textual analysis,[61] this study asserts that the *Diamond Sūtra* should be analyzed within its full context—its genre as a Mahāyāna sūtra—and in relation to the conditioned world, rather than being restricted to an overly systematic lens

[60] Conze, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines & Its Verse Summary, xiv.*
[61] McKee, "A Beginner's Guide to Textual Analysis."

derived from later Prajñāpāramitā scholasticism. Conze's assumption that all Prajñāpāramitā sūtras are "literary documents" meant to systematically reflect a unified philosophical system not only affects the accuracy of his Sanskrit text reconstruction (as discussed earlier) but also reduces the *Diamond Sūtra* to a narrow doctrinal treatment of emptiness, limited to ontological, psychological, and logical interpretations on a few central topics.[62] Furthermore, describing the *Diamond Sūtra* as a succinct summary of the *Perfection of Wisdom* has become a common trend in modern Buddhist Studies, despite the text's lack of seemingly definitional concepts such as *śūnyatā* (emptiness) and *upāya* (skillful means), leaving it, as some scholars note, "equally puzzling."[63]

In contrast, most Asian monastic Dharma Masters tend to elucidate sūtras, especially the *Diamond Sūtra*, verse by verse to uncover their underlying meanings rather than through semantic structure. This verse-based exegesis is evident in the works of influential figures such as Vasubandhu[64] and Hui-Neng,[65] and remains common in contemporary monastic interpretations.[66] This approach may not be merely a remnant of oral tradition, but a deliberate methodology aimed at preserving the sūtra's original intent. The structural division into thirty-two chapters, with titles attributed to Prince Chao-ming (501–531), makes the sūtra more accessible, even though this division reflects his interpretive view that the sūtra addresses the body of the Buddha, marked by thirty-two attributes.[67]

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[62] Conze, *The Prajñāpāramitā Literature (1960-1978 Reprint)*, 1; Conze, *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā, Edited and Translated with Introduction and Glossary*, 11.
[63] Schopen, "Diamond Sūtra."
[64] Vasubandhu, "Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitāsūtraśāstra."
[65] Cleary, *The Sutra of Hui-Neng, Grand Master of Zen*.
[66] Refer to Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Diamond That Cuts Through Illusion*; Thich Huyen Chau, *Dẫn Vào Tâm Kim Cang*.
[67] Red Pine, *The Diamond Sutra: The Perfection of Wisdom, chap. 1*.

In summary, monastic traditions, benefiting from an oral transmission heritage, approach the *Diamond Sūtra* at the verse level, often without requiring a formalized structural framework. In contrast, modern Western scholarship tends to seek a semantic structure to engage with the text and frequently adopts the broader Prajñāpāramitā system as its interpretive frame—sometimes resulting in conceptual challenges and limiting the sūtra's meaning to discrete philosophical topics. This subsection seeks to address these issues in two parts: (1) identifying the semantic structure of the sūtra and (2) examining its overall essence as a Mahāyāna sūtra. Further textual analysis, with reference to the conditioned world, will be discussed later in the next subsection on the foundational basis of the sūtra.

2.2.2.1 Inherent three-round semantic structure in the Diamond Sūtra

While agreeing with Shi Huifeng's methodology of discerning the meaning of a sūtra—particularly large *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras—through its structure,[68] the author does not find it necessary to identify and arrange literary sections within a sūtra that presents multifaceted textual witnesses, such as the *Diamond Sūtra*, in order to achieve a clear structure. Instead, the author holds that each discourse manifests with a specific goal, directed toward an audience with particular levels of skill and faculty. Thus, such a discourse is delivered according to a goal-oriented semantic structure, rather than through an intentionally segmented form. For instance, the sūtra *Turning the Dharma Wheel* (SA 379, *Dharmacakrapravartana*),[69] corresponding to SN 56.11 in the *Nikāya*,[70] exemplifies a semantic structure aligned with the Buddha's three rounds of

[68] Shi, *The Structure and Interpretation of Early Prajñāpāramitā*, 4–17.
[69] Pierquet, "Saṁyukta Āgama 379: Turning the Dharma Wheel."
[70] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1843–48.

teaching the Four Noble Truths: (1) expounding the unknown truths, (2) motivating practice, and (3) realization.[71]

Likewise, the *Diamond Sūtra* initially arises from the inquiry of Elder Subhūti, representing those who have set out on the bodhisattva path, on how to stand, proceed, and control their minds. After being guided by the Buddha, Elder Subhūti asks the second question concerning on the capacity of fully understanding the discourse of beings in the future and receives confirmation from Tathāgata. Thereafter is a reversed conversation, where the Bhagavat asks, Elder Subhūti responds from his understanding, and Bhagavat certifies his responses and conclude the discourse that the conditioned is illusory. Hence, the *Diamond Sūtra* is semantically lectured in three rounds: (1) expounding the path for bodhisattvas to train their minds, (2) motivating to practice, and (3) realization. Accordingly, the author summarizes the sūtra in three separate paragraphs in the preceding sub-section. Without identifying the high-level roadmap, its underlying practical meanings in the *Diamond Sūtra* can be overlooked.

2.2.2.2 The overall essence of the Diamond Sūtra

From the aspects of interpretation and applicability of the *Diamond Sūtra*, Venerable Master Thich Tue Sy (1943-2023) asserts that if the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā* corpus, containing the *Diamond Sūtra*, elucidates the direct cognition of the Truth, the *Diamond Sūtra* specifically guides audience toward the realization of the Truth.[72] Indeed, there are three paths, corresponding to three rounds of teaching, toward the ultimate Truth in the *Diamond Sūtra* for different extents of capacity. The first round of teaching, with the complete guidance for bodhisattvas, holds the essence of the *Diamond Sūtra*. The second round supplements the first

[71] Refer to Bhikkhu Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words*, p.48-9 for detailed explanation of the three rounds.
[72] Thich Tue Sy, "Tính Khế Lý Và Khế Cơ Trong Kinh Kim Cang."

with encouragement, details, and more means upon the concern on the capacity of understanding the profound sūtra. The last round of realization is the testimony of understanding for practitioners, who have "set out on the bodhisattva path" and been practicing what are taught in the first two rounds, to self-check their true understanding through experience at different extent. It is the path that the partially enlightened should pass through and transcend the attained toward the Perfect of Wisdom.

Thus, to avoid puzzling unprepared audience by the illusion of perceptions, intellectually analyzing the last round is left out from the scope of this thesis.

2.2.3 Foundational Doctrines and Continuity with Early Buddhist Teachings

Originated from the hypothesis of modern scholars about the authenticity of the *Diamond Sūtra* and the implicit doctrine of emptiness, this sub-section discusses the following foundational questions: (1) does the *Diamond Sūtra* target human beings? and (2) what is the final passage of this discourse?

2.2.3.1 Human – The target audience

Clearly, the audience of the discourse is those who have set out on the bodhisattva path, for whom Elder Subhūti presents to ask questions. Who are they particularly? There are variants in renditions. They are good/noble men and women as explicitly mentioned in Kumārajīva's translation (§2).[73] The constructed Sanskrit text does not mention the species of these bodhisattva but ends with the delight from monks, nuns, laypersons, and the whole world including humans

[73] Kumārajīva, §2: [善男子、善女人］(Sino-Vietnamese: thiện nam tử, thiện nữ nhân)

on the preached verses (§32).[74] Thus, the *Diamond Sūtra* is a discourse for human, especially those who have departed on the bodhisattva path.

2.2.3.2 The conditioned and emptiness

In their selective engagement (*vitarka*) with the *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus—emphasizing conceptual analysis (*vitarka*) and projecting perceptions (*saṁjñā*) of an unstated notion of *śūnyatā*—many scholars seek out what they perceive as paradoxical logic within the *Diamond Sūtra*, particularly in its third round. Yet in doing so, they often neglect the sūtra's final and perhaps most critical passage that all conditioned phenomena should be regarded as illusions, bubbles, or dreams (§32).

The conditioned (*saṁkṛta*) is etymologically defined as "that which has been created (*kṛta*) by multiple causes in union and combination."[75] This study proposes that advanced practitioners—especially those with sharp faculties, who profoundly practice *Prajñāpāramitā* and validate their practical experience through engagement with the final teaching round of the *Diamond Sūtra*—can articulate the concept of emptiness based on their realized understanding. Empty of what? Grounded in the experience of dependent origination, the Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna (circa 150–250 CE) describes that "all existing things are empty of permanent and self-constituting natures."[76] According to Grand Zen Master Hui-neng (638–713), it is the emptiness of appearances and attachments in the minds of those who can place serene faith in the teachings of the *Diamond Sūtra*.[77]

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[74] Harrison, "Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā: A New English Translation of the Sanskrit Text Based on Two Manuscripts from Greater Gandhāra," 159.
[75] Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, 1991, 1:64.
[76] Wright, "Philosophy," 649.
[77] Cleary, *The Sutra of Hui-Neng, Grand Master of Zen*, chap. 6.

2.2.3.3 From dependent origination to liberation

Why is *śūnyatā* not explicitly addressed in the *Diamond Sūtra*? It is because the *Diamond Sūtra* is taught in response to an inquiry about the path toward realization and ultimate liberation, rather than focusing on the state of realization itself. The sūtra's guidance begins in the conditioned world, where its human audience lives and directly experiences the nature of suffering. Therefore, the epilogue of the sūtra, expressed through a four-line *śloka*, serves not only as a foundational passage for the *Diamond Sūtra* but also reflects what the Buddha taught in the discourse on Dependent Origination (SA 298, *Pratītyasamutpāda*),[78] corresponding to SN 12.1–2 in the *Nikāya*.[79] This teaching points to the emptiness of permanent, unique, and independent phenomena—a truth that can be directly realized through the experiences of aging, death, life's vicissitudes, and the entire mass of suffering, all of which are conditioned by birth.

Initiated by ignorance (*avidyā*), volitional formations (*saṃskāra*) arise. These volitional formations condition the emergence of consciousness (*vijñāna*). Subsequently, each of the other links in dependent origination—including name-and-form (*nāmarūpa*), the six sense bases (*ṣaḍāyatana*), contact (*sparśa*), sensation (*vedanā*), craving (*tṛṣṇā*), clinging (*upādāna*), existence (*bhava*), and birth (*jāti*)—arise in dependence on the preceding condition (*nidāna*). Finally, birth conditions aging-and-death (*jarāmaraṇa*), along with sorrow, lamentation, and distress. In summary, with the arising of this, that arises. Accordingly, the Buddha taught that these circular links in dependent origination continue infinitely to generate suffering until any one of the twelve links ceases (SA 298, SN 12.1:2).

But which link can be broken—and by what means? The *Diamond Sūtra* reveals a path to complete liberation (*parinirvāṇa*) from suffering in *saṃsāra* by breaking dependent origination

[78] Guṇabhadra, "Saṃyuktāgama," sc. 12, 85a111.
[79] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 533–36.

at the link of clinging (*upādāna*). The means (*upāya*) for ceasing clinging will be explored in the following chapters.

3 Chapter 3: Mutual Correlation of Interpretation and Praxis

The previous chapter established a reliable summary of the *Diamond Sūtra*, identifying its inherent three-round semantic structure and its central focus on the liberating path, grounded in dependent origination. Building upon these textual and philosophical foundations, this chapter explores deeper meanings in the sūtra's essential teachings as they relate to praxis. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section analyzes the core essence of the first round of teaching in the *Diamond Sūtra*, focusing on the inquiry of Elder Subhūti and the Buddha's responses (§2:5), examined through experiential commentaries. The second section addresses Subhūti's concern in his second question regarding the applicability of these teachings for future beings (§6), explored within the context of contemporary society.

3.1 The Essence of the *Diamond Sūtra* from Experienced Practitioners

Following the Buddha's attainment of final Nirvāṇa **(***parinirvāṇa***)**, who can fully understand and expound his teachings (*Buddhavacana*)? To address discrepancies in transmission over time, traditions, cultural contexts, and interpretive bias, this section focuses on two key early commentators on the *Diamond Sūtra*: Vasubandhu (4th century) and Hui-neng (638–713). Among the many commentaries developed over thousands of years, these figures are strategically selected for their proximity to the Buddha's era and their enduring influence.

Vasubandhu, renowned for his extensive commentarial work and his deep impact on subsequent Buddhist thought, represents a synthesis of practical and scholastic exegesis in early Indian Buddhism. His *Abhidharmakośabhaṣyam*, a foundational text in Buddhist psychology, exemplifies his authoritative role in doctrinal analysis.

By contrast, Hui-neng remains a historically obscure figure, known primarily through the Platform Sūtra,[80] a complete bodily relic preserved in Nanhua Temple in China, and his lasting influence on Chan (*Dhyāna*) Buddhism across East Asia and Vietnam. Despite few verifiable records, his attributed teachings have shaped practices in China, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. His commentary represents a tradition grounded in direct experience rather than scholasticism.

In this section, their interpretations of the *Diamond Sūtra* are studied as authoritative early commentaries, closely aligned with the primary sources, to analyze the essential verses of the sūtra along the mind training path presented in the first round of the sūtra's teachings, from chapters §2 to §5, according to the traditional division. The following subsections will analyze the first round of teaching—summarized in the previous chapter—through these key commentaries, grounding them in early Buddhist teachings while drawing connections to modern perspectives.

3.1.1 Bodhisattva Path Aligning with the Path of Mind Training

From the direct aspect of content, the Sūtra starts with the initial question of Elder Subhūti on behalf of those who have set out the bodhisattva path on how to stand (√sthā, 住), proceed (prati-√pad), and control (pra-√grah, 降伏) their minds (§2). In Kumārajīva's rendition, the question is for those who raise the mind aiming Anuttarā Samyaksaṃbodhi without the verb "proceed."[81] In general, bodhisattva is a person who "destined for enlightenment, Buddha-to-be"[82] and Anuttarā Samyaksaṃbodhi is the supreme (anuttara) perfect enlightenment

[80] Zong-bao, "The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch 六祖大師法寶壇經."
[81] Kumārajīva, trans., T0235, p. 0749: […發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提心, 應云何住？云何降伏其心？]. Sino-Vietnamese: "… phát A nậu đa la Tam miệu Tam Bồ dề tâm, ưng vân hà trụ, vân hà hàng phục kỳ tâm?"
[82] Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, 2:403.

(samyaksaṃbodhi), attained by the Buddha.[83] Thus, two renditions basically mention audience who destined for the ultimate perfect enlightenment.

However, the audience in Kumārajīva's translation and Vasubandhu's commentary may be broader, ranging from those who have just endured an ontological shift in mind with a thought aiming the ultimate perfect enlightenment, to those who have made far progress on the bodhisattva path. Yet when the Buddha directly responses that "Great Bodhisattvas should control their mind as follows,"[84] the audience is specifically narrowed down to the Great Bodhisattvas, the term that will be mentioned in the later context in the original text. Although it seems abrupt without mentioning the standing phase for novice practitioners, the question and the response in this rendition are congruent with the target audience of experienced bodhisattvas.

Meanwhile, the audience in the original text is more specific in the initial question from the aspect of knowing they must persistently go through a path and being on the path. Hence, the question is not only about how to initially stand and finally control their minds but also about how to proceed. In other words, with three phrases in a question, Elder Subhūti represents bodhisattvas, regardless of where they are on path from the conditioned world to the unconditioned, to inquire for a complete path of training their minds.

The brief guidance from the Buddha can be split into two parts. The first is to produce the mind of completely liberate all living beings (*sattva*) from saṁsāra to Nirvāṇa. In this context, *sattva* should be interpreted as "living beings" as in Harrison's translation to broadly include all beings with perceptions (sentient beings) and no-perceptions, described in details in the sūtra

[83] Anuttarā Samyaksaṃbodhi is mentioned in all renditions of the Vaj in §7. It is firstly mentioned in §2 of Kumārajīva's rendition and Vasubandhu's commentary.
[84]Kumārajīva, trans., T0235, p. 0749: [諸菩薩摩訶薩應如是降伏其心：], Sino-Vietnamese: "chư Bồ tát ma ha tát ưng như thị hàng phục kỳ tâm:"

(§3).[85] Vasubandhu mentions such mind as *bodhicitta*, abode of bodhisattvas. Such mind should be broad, supreme, and constant. First, if not broad, how can it embrace all living beings? Next, such mind is supreme due to the volition aiming the ultimate liberation. Because such mind is constant, bodhisattvas regard all beings as themselves and bodhisattva's Nirvāṇa is not different from Nirvāṇa for all beings.[86]

The second part of the guidance teaches that although countless living beings have been completely liberated, in truth no being has been completely liberated—because in the minds of bodhisattvas, the perception of a being, a lifespan (*jīva*), or a person (*pudgala*) does not arise. What, then, is perception (*saṁjñā*)? It is the grasping of signs from objects through the six sense faculties.[87] According to early Buddhist teachings, all perceptions—whether coarse or subtle—are ultimately void and insubstantial, like a mirage shimmering under the sun (SN 22.95, SA 265).[88] In practice, when the mind-stream becomes continuous, with each broad and supreme thought arising seamlessly as the prior one ceases, there remains no interval for any other thought—no space for even a fleeting perception—to arise. In such a mind-stream, constant and undistracted, illusory perceptions of living beings are naturally absent, revealing the emptiness of all such fabrications.

Thus, the two-part guidance fully covers the three-phrase inquiry from Elder Subhūti for bodhisattvas on how to stand, practice, and control their minds. Where to stand? In the great vow of bodhisattva to completely liberate all livings from saṁsāra to Nirvāṇa. How to practice? Driven by the first wholesome, broad and supreme thought, bodhisattvas take actions, through

[85] Harrison, "Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā: A New English Translation of the Sanskrit Text Based on Two Manuscripts from Greater Gandhāra," 142.
[86] Vasubandhu and Bodhiruci (trans.), "Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitāsūtraśāstra," 0317c.
[87] Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhaṣyam*, 2012, 1:115–16.
[88] Guṇabhadra, "Saṃyuktāgama," 802a; Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 951.

three karmas of body, speech, and mind, on countless living beings. How to control minds? By constantly practice until the full attention on liberating livings is continuously present on three karmas and there is no attention on the objects of liberating.

According to the practice guided by modern scholastic practitioner Allan Wallace,[89] the mind training of bodhisattva can be elucidated as a process started from the first stage of directed attention on the bodhisattva vow. It progresses through intermediate stages, such as tamed attention, pacified attention, single-pointed attention with conceptually discursive mind on the perception of living beings calm like an ocean without wave, and attentional balance that is sustained long and effortlessly on the bodhisattva vow. Finally, bodhisattva attains the final stage of śamatha with perfect stability and vividness.

The author notices that the so-called "signature formula,"[90] the "affirmation-negation-affirmation" strategy,[91] or the "logical form," that is "equivalent to its contradictory opposite,"[92] of the *Diamond Sūtra* firstly occurs right in the first brief guidance (§3), in the concept of completely liberated living beings, not until the end of the first round of teaching when mentioning about the possession of marks (§5). The "signature formula" of the first complete guidance of mind training for bodhisattvas can be briefly reconstructed as follows: a bodhisattva completely liberating all living beings but seeing no living beings liberated is called the bodhisattva completely liberating all living beings. However, the underlying meanings of bodhisattva in two affirmations are different. The first is just a conventional name for whoever has raised the bodhisattva vow. Meanwhile, the second aims those who departed from the

[89] Wallace, *The Attention Revolution*.
[90] Harrison, "Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā: A New English Translation of the Sanskrit Text Based on Two Manuscripts from Greater Gandhāra," 136–38.
[91] Ibid., 149.
[92] Conze, *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā, Edited and Translated with Introduction and Glossary*, 11–12.

conditioned world and have proceeded on the path leading toward the unconditioned by practicing the great vow constantly to the extent of not seeing the separation between self and living beings.

In short, the guidance seems self-contradicting and abstruse as puns from the logical view. However, practitioners do not read a sūtra as a piece of literature, try to understand each śloka by sole logical minds, nor accept it by a blind faith. Instead, each verse should be contemplated and practiced to be absorbed partially through direct experience.

3.1.2 Non-abiding Giving – a Means of Practice

Yet how to completely liberate living beings from suffering? How to practice efficiently? The Bhagavat teaches non-abiding giving after the complete guidance on mind training. In particular, giving should be done by one who abides nowhere (§4).[93] The author interprets "dāna" as the act of giving, not a gift,[94] to avoid binding "dāna" to tangible objects.

Vasubandhu expounds non-abiding giving, also known as dānapāramitā, the perfect of giving, is the practice and abode of bodhisattva. Giving consists of three types: material goods, fearlessness, and Dharmas. Among these, giving material goods is the essence of dānapāramitā to support livelihood. Fearlessness giving requires practicing disciplines and patience in givers, who is not feeling fear in unwholesome deeds. Dharma giving requires diligence, skillfully understand mind, and preach the Dharma truthfully. In short, practicing dānapāramitā aims all six perfections of giving, discipline, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom.[95]

[93] "na kvacitpratiṣṭhitena dānam dātavyam," Harrison and Watanabe, "Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā," 114.
[94] Conze, *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā, Edited and Translated with Introduction and Glossary*, 67; Harrison, "Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā: A New English Translation of the Sanskrit Text Based on Two Manuscripts from Greater Gandhāra," 143.
[95] Vasubandhu, "Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitāsūtraśāstra," 0318b.

However, in the Eight Thousand Lines the Bhagavat does not praise the perfection of giving but only the perfection of wisdom because of the reason that giving undedicated to all-knowledge cannot be perfect.[96] Then why is non-abiding giving taught after the guidance of mind training in the *Diamond Sūtra*? Because the essence of the Sūtra is the practical paths and non-abiding giving is the practical means to completely liberate all livings.

In other words, bodhisattvas should give support to the complete range of suffering, from body to mind, without abiding anywhere—not in forms, sounds, scents, tastes, touchable, mind-objects, or perceptions of signs (§4). It means a bodhisattva should not attach to the given object, the object of giving, or the subject of giving. Otherwise, the givers attach to repaying attitude and results of giving.[97]

Why is it stated in the sūtra that the merit of a bodhisattva who gives without attachment is immeasurable—like the immeasurable space in any of the ten directions? Vasubandhu explains that it is because the true meaning of giving is accomplished.[98] Therefore, when instructing bodhisattvas on the practice of giving, the Bhagavat emphasizes the principle of non-abiding. With this teaching on non-abiding giving, the Buddha fully addresses Elder Subhūti's threefold inquiry concerning how bodhisattvas should stand, practice, and control their minds.

Yet, what constitutes the true meaning of giving? And how does this non-abiding form of giving produce immeasurable merit—merit as vast as space,[99] itself one of the three unconditioned phenomena? These are the essential questions explored in the final part of the first round of teaching.

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[96] Conze, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines & Its Verse Summary*, 111.
[97] Vasubandhu, "Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitāsūtraśāstra," 0318b-c.
[98] Ibid., 0318c.
[99] Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, 1991, 1:59.

3.1.3 The Tathāgata – the Suchness, the Unconditioned

After presenting a complete path of mind training for bodhisattvas in response to Elder Subhūti's inquiry, the Bhagavat then asks whether the Tathāgata can be seen through the possession of marks. Upon Elder Subhūti's correct negation, the Buddha concludes the first round of teaching by affirming that the Tathāgata must be seen "through non-mark among marks" (§5). As previously noted in the accompanying footnote in the summary subsection, this study intentionally preserves the original Sanskrit-influenced syntax of the phrase in interpretive translation. This expression is profoundly nuanced and, rather than being reduced through translation, demands detailed exegetical analysis.

Why must the Tathāgata be seen through non-mark among marks? First, the term Tathāgata, meaning "one who has thus gone" or "thus come" by its etymological definition, is the Buddha's primary self-referential pronoun, used in place of "I" in teachings. According to the early sūtra *The World* (MA 137, *Lokasūtra*),[100] corresponding to AN 4.23 in the *Nikāya*,[101] the Tathāgata is one who fully awakens to the world and its beings, speaks only suchness since attaining Supreme Perfect Enlightenment, is unsurpassed in the world, and perceives all phenomena. In short, transcending all conditioned phenomena, the Tathāgata is the unconditioned and embodies suchness.

In their commentaries on the *Diamond Sūtra*, Vasubandhu and Hui-neng both explain that the Tathāgata's essence is unconditioned, while all appearances are conditioned; therefore, the Tathāgata cannot be truly seen through the possession of marks.[102]

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[100] Gautama Saṅghadeva, "Madhyamāgama," 0077c.
[101] Thich Minh Chau, *Kinh Tăng Chi Bộ - Aṅguttara Nikāya*, 1:358.
[102] Vasubandhu, "Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitāsūtraśāstra," 0319a-b; Cleary, *The Sutra of Hui-Neng, Grand Master of Zen*. chap. 5.

Specifically, Grand Master Hui-neng further explains that ordinary people perceive the Tathāgata merely as a physical form marked by features, rather than realizing the Tathāgata as suchness—likened to space, which cannot be represented by physical attributes. The Buddha, therefore, poses this question to emphasize that the Tathāgata can only be truly seen by those who recognize suchness through the illusion of marks. Similarly, an ordinary person, focusing solely on external characteristics and manifest actions of others, fails to recognize the pure essence common to all sentient beings and thus cannot universally respect them. Only those who perceive this essence can practice non-abiding giving and cultivate the perfection of wisdom—the true understanding that "all beings have the same one true essence, fundamentally pure and unpolluted, with countless functions," according to Grand Master Hui-neng.[103]

Such true essence, although referred to by different names—such as Buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha*) in all sentient beings, as highlighted elsewhere in Hui-neng's commentaries; dharma body (*dharmakāya*), as mentioned by Vasubandhu; the ultimate reality (*dharmatā*) of all phenomena; emptiness; or the ground consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) in Yogācāra—is regarded as supreme in Mahāyāna doctrine. The concept of Buddha-nature is a major topic explored in detail in other Mahāyāna sūtras, including the *Lotus Sūtra*, *Avataṁsaka Sūtra*, and *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. For instance, in Chapter 28 of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*,[104] *tathāgatagarbha* is interchangeably described as emptiness, formlessness, non-conceptuality, realm of reality, dharma-nature, dharma-body, that which is devoid of self-existence, that which neither arises nor ceases, original quiescence, Nirvāṇa, and intrinsic Nirvāṇa.

[103] Cleary, *The Sutra of Hui-Neng, Grand Master of Zen*, chap. 5.
[104] Red Pine, *The Lankavatara Sutra*.

However, a detailed discussion of true essence or emptiness lies beyond the scope of this study, as these concepts are not explicitly addressed in the first round of teachings of a mind training path in the *Diamond Sūtra*.

The primary objective of this study, consistent with the spirit of the *Diamond Sūtra* and as elaborated in the findings section, is to elucidate the practical liberating path through direct experience rather than to provide an intellectual exposition on abstract concepts.

Instead, through his concise reference to the true essence of the Tathāgata and all beings, Grand Master Hui-neng reveals the deeper meaning of non-abiding giving: bodhisattvas give without discrimination based on appearances or attributes of living beings, grounded in their unwavering belief in the pure essence inherent in all beings. This pure essence, although temporarily obscured by diverse physical forms and behaviors, provides the foundation for the eventual realization of the perfection of wisdom. Since this essence is boundless, the merit of such giving is as immeasurable as space. By giving without attachment—rooted in the recognition of this shared pure nature—bodhisattvas deepen their understanding of it and progressively cultivate the perfection of wisdom.

In summary, all phenomena—including the Tathāgata and living beings—must be perceived "through non-mark among marks" to realize the formless, imperceptible pure essence beyond illusory appearances. Upon realizing the suchness of all phenomena through sustained practice, bodhisattvas no longer perceive a fixed self, nor distinctions between self and others. Consequently, the perception that any living being has been completely liberated does not arise in their minds—even though, from a conventional perspective, countless beings may benefit from the bodhisattvas' practice of non-abiding giving.

3.1.4 Findings on the Essence and the Uniqueness – Questions 1 and 2

Notably, the sūtra does not explicitly explain why a person initially chooses to set out on the bodhisattva path. This question, considered by this study to be a critical entry point for contemporary practitioners, will be explored in Chapter 4 through the analysis of core teachings as they apply to real-life scenarios. However, through the analysis of the first round of teachings in the *Diamond Sūtra* at the verse level, in correlation with authoritative early commentaries, early Buddhist teachings, and Mahāyāna doctrines, this section concludes with findings addressing the first two research questions proposed at the beginning of the study.

3.1.4.1 Question 1: What is the true essence of the Diamond Sūtra?

The core essence of the *Diamond Sūtra* is the mind-training path for those who set out on the bodhisattva journey. It is a path arising from a pure aspiration to liberate all living beings to the ultimate Nirvāṇa, grounded in a profound belief in the pure essence shared by all beings, and directed toward the realization of suchness through the perfection of wisdom. Specifically, with the initial thought of liberating all beings, a person who sets out on the bodhisattva path practices giving without abiding in any of the six external fields of perception, firmly rooted in the understanding that all living beings—like the Tathāgata—share a pure, undefiled essence. Through this practice, the bodhisattva realizes that essence beyond all appearances and perceptions and thereby cultivates the perfection of wisdom. Consequently, although many beings in the conditioned world may be liberated through the bodhisattva's actions, no perception of conditioned phenomena arises in a mind that sees all things through their suchness.

3.1.4.2 Question 2: What is the uniqueness of the liberating path in the Diamond Sūtra among Mahāyāna doctrines?

The liberating path guided by the *Diamond Sūtra* is unique in its integration of logical coherence, experiential realization, and practical applicability.

First, the logical coherence of the *Diamond Sūtra* transcends conventional logic, yet remains consistent when all phenomena are discerned through their pure essence. As discussed in detail in the preceding subsections, the notions that a bodhisattva completely liberates all living beings yet perceives none as liberated, or that the Tathāgata must be seen "through non-mark among marks," are not paradoxical to practitioners who recognize the pure essence concealed by various behaviors and appearances. What may appear paradoxical dissolves for those who do not cling to literal words, syntactical forms, conventional reasoning, or interpretations, but instead seek the sūtra's true meaning through dedicated practice, as guided by its teachings.

Moreover, the sūtra's logical coherence is consistently conveyed through its essential teachings. While the sūtra emphasizes that all conditioned phenomena are illusory, it notably does not explicitly reference terms such as emptiness, Buddha-nature, or even wisdom. Yet, by initiating the discernment of pure essence beyond attachment to marks and notions, true understanding arises through direct experience along the path of non-abiding practice. This experiential realization consolidates the sūtra's deeper logic—one that unfolds not through theoretical exposition but through lived, transformative engagement with its teachings.

From the perspective of practical applicability, the bodhisattva path, as guided by the *Diamond Sūtra*'s clear emphasis on non-abiding giving, raises no further questions about the feasibility of benefiting all sentient beings or the altruistic nature of the bodhisattva ideal. The true meaning of non-abiding giving lies not in conventional perceptions of the giver, receiver, the

material, or the act itself, but in the discernment of the pure essence within all conditioned phenomena—enabling compassionate action free from attachment and conceptual distinctions.

In summary, the liberating path in the *Diamond Sūtra* is unique in three respects: (1) it cultivates experiential realization rather than elaborating abstract concepts; (2) it maintains consistent logical coherence by emphasizing essence over conventional names and forms; and (3) it demonstrates the feasibility of true non-abiding giving, shifting the focus toward cultivating the perfection of wisdom grounded in serene thought and directed toward the deep realization of the shared pure essence among countless living beings.

3.2 Realistic Concerns on the Praxis of the *Diamond Sūtra*

The previous section discussed the essence of the sūtra in the full practical bodhisattva path of non-abiding mind training, from the conditioned world to the conditioned, through the means of non-abiding giving to cultivate the perfect wisdom – true understanding the suchness of all conditioned and unconditioned phenomena. This section addresses Elder Subhūti's concern regarding whether future beings—including those living today—can attain this true understanding by following the guided path of the *Diamond Sūtra*. This inquiry is examined through the lenses of ontology, logicality, and psychology, which correspond to craving, clinging, and existing links in the law of dependent origination.

3.2.1 Craving on Constrained Resources in the Conditioned World

What is the present time? It is a fast-changing century, "marked by stress and alienation in the social fabric," along with disdain and anger toward other groups, and a lack of understanding for "the fears that torment others."[105] While giving fearlessness has been

[105] Lancaster, *Buddhist Encounters: Finding a Home in the Human Condition*, 3–11.

suggested as a responsibility for power holders in international humanitarian law,[106] the largest territorial conflict in Europe since World War II began, causing thousands of civilian deaths alongside the ongoing COVID pandemic. It means even the fear of death and illness cannot hinder craving in this desire realm.

While acknowledging the benevolence of those who suggest the power holders to give fearlessness to civilians, the author realizes that people cannot give what they do not possess. According to the Buddha's teachings in The Great Cause Sūtra (MA 97, *Mahānidānasūtra*),[107] corresponding to DN 15 in the Nikāya,[108] a war, as well as quarrels, conflicts, disputes, and countless evil and unwholesome things, is caused by a sequence of conditions, starting with craving, leading to clinging due to the fear of losing what was gained. How can the power holders, immersed in the fear of losing their powers, practice giving fearlessness? Likewise, how can those who do not truly understand Dharma practice giving Dharma? Furthermore, how can those who do not realize that they themselves do not truly understand Dharma practice giving Dharma?

3.2.2 Fixity in Perception

Furthermore, contemporary people do not accept that the *Diamond Sūtra* and what the Buddha taught are beyond perceptions. They do not accept that Buddhist Dharma is not for discussion but practice. While paths from the conditioned to the conditioned are taught in the *Diamond Sūtra*, scholars tend to discuss the unconditioned, conventionally named as śūnyatā or emptiness. While discussing the undefiled paths which require practice to cultivate the perfect wisdom, scholars try to understand them by fixed logic. How can a logical form, with a binary

[106] Kilby, "The Gift of Fearlessness: A Buddhist Framework for the Protection of Vulnerable Populations under International Humanitarian Law."
[107] Gautama Saṅghadeva, "Madhyamāgama," 579.
[108] Bhikkhu Sujato, *Long Discourses: A Faithful Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, 2:50.

value of either true or false or even quaternary value in the modern logic, is applicable to a śloka about one identical pure essence with infinite functions hidden under a conditioned phenomenon? Even many-valued logic questions about the existence of the Tathāgata after death, with four values of true, false, both true and false, and neither true nor false, was invalidated by the Buddha with the confirmation that liberation must be based on direct understanding of reality (MA 97, DN 15),[109] but people do not stop trying to understand Dharmas by the so-called modern logic.[110]

3.2.3 Analytical Constraints in the Existence of the Conventional World

From a psychological perspective, the *Diamond Sūtra* is commonly interpreted as urging practitioners to "raise a thought that does not abide anywhere."[111] However, this teaching is often misunderstood in modern contexts due to the "error in the view of a modern scientific materialist analysis, in which mind is considered to be biochemistry."[112] Such frameworks, grounded in external observation and empirical validation, often neglect the introspective and non-conceptual dimensions essential to Buddhist practice.

As a result, contemporary scholars frequently assess the teachings of the *Diamond Sūtra* through incomplete historical evidence, literary comparisons, philological reconstructions, logical inference, and reasoned analysis—methods the Buddha explicitly cautioned against in the discourse to the Kālāmas (AN 3.65).[113] While these methods are valuable within their own

[109] Gautama Saṅghadeva, "Madhyamāgama," 580; Bhikkhu Sujato, *Long Discourses: A Faithful Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, 2:61.
[110] Priest, "Beyond True and False."
[111] Conze, *The Prajñāpāramitā Literature (1960-1978 Reprint)*, 11.
[112] Goodman, *The Buddhist Psychology of Awakening*, 66.
[113] Bhikkhu Sujato, *Numbered Discourses: A Sensible Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, 1:250.

domains, they often lead to doubts about matters that should instead be discerned through pure wisdom**,** as emphasized in *MA 16*, the corresponding counterpart in the Āgama.[114]

Consequently, the teaching of a non-abiding mind is often interpreted merely as a useful psychological attitude or cognitive strategy. This reduced interpretation risks overlooking the deeper awakening implications of the practice. When non-abiding is treated merely as a positive mindset—rather than as a transformative gateway to transcending conditioned perception—practitioners may lack Right View, the essential foundation for sustainable engagement with the mind-training path.

3.2.4 Findings on the Concern of Elder Subhūti – Question 3

Through examining contemporary society from the scholarly perspectives of ontology, logic, and psychology—corresponding respectively to the craving, clinging, and existing links in the law of dependent origination—this section concludes with findings related to the third research question proposed at the beginning of the study.

Question 3: Why did Elder Subhūti express concern about "serene faith" in future beings upon hearing the sūtra?

Drawing on the findings regarding the essence and uniqueness of the liberating path in the *Diamond Sūtra* (outlined in the previous section) and the analysis of contemporary societal dynamics presented here, it becomes evident that Elder Subhūti's concern about "serene faith" represents a critical warning for modern practitioners. Immersed in a causal torrent of craving for conflicted resources, clinging to rigid perspectives, and placing faith solely in tangible results rather than in the transformative path of experiential cultivation, contemporary minds find it

[114] Gautama Saṅghadeva, "Madhyamāgama," 438.

difficult for a thought of true serenity to arise—thus impairing their ability to understand the essence of the *Diamond Sūtra*.

This concern should also be reconsidered by spiritual teachers. As Venerable Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh compassionately affirms, "More than two thousand years have passed since the Buddha entered parinirvāṇa, and there are still many people who practice the precepts and accept these teachings."[115] While fully acknowledging this encouragement, this study also raises the need to balance optimism with caution: true understanding of the essence, as expounded by Grand Master Hui-neng, arises not merely from learning (*śrutamayī prajñā*) or reflection (*cintāmayī prajñā*), but from direct experiential realization (*bhāvanāmayī prajñā*).[116] Only through such direct practice can it be ensured that, among the millions who hear the *Diamond Sūtra*, there are those who truly understand its teachings and engage in the practice of non-abiding giving—rooted in serene faith in the pure essence of all living beings.

In summary, this chapter addressed the first three research questions—concerning the essence, uniqueness, and practical relevance of the *Diamond Sūtra*—through an integrated approach combining textual interpretation, experiential commentary, and analysis of contemporary societal concerns on the praxis of the *Diamond Sūtra*.

[115] Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Diamond That Cuts Through Illusion*, chap. 6.
[116] Cleary, *The Sutra of Hui-Neng, Grand Master of Zen*, 77.

4 Chapter 4: Case Analysis – Praxis in adversity by analytical insights

As discussed in the previous chapter regarding the seemingly infinite momentum of the dependent origination torrent, this study recognizes that extreme conditions may be necessary to spark the manifestation of the first single thought of serenity—a kṣana of clarity in which the true essence of beings is glimpsed, enabling a critical decision to depart from the stream of saṃsāra. The motivating force must be sufficiently powerful for a novice bodhisattva to stand firmly and pursue the unconditioned along the non-abiding path outlined in the *Diamond Sūtra*.

Accordingly, this chapter analyzes the application of the path toward the perfection of wisdom through non-abiding giving, using the case of prisoners enduring suffering under severe constraints: confinement in limited space, deprivation of material possessions, severance from family and friends, and internal conflicts exacerbated by competition for scarce resources.

The analysis proceeds in four sections: (1) background, (2) root causes, (3) alternative solutions, and (4) the practice of the non-abiding path in the *Diamond Sūtra*, structured in alignment with the Four Noble Truths: (1) suffering (*duḥkha*), (2) origin (*samudaya*), (3) cessation (*nirodha*), and (4) the path (*mārga*) to liberation. Each part will be examined through two lenses: (1) a mundane lens grounded in psychology and (2) a supra-mundane lens grounded in sūtras on dependent origination and Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*.

The chapter concludes with extrapolated findings for practitioners, drawn from this case analysis, to illustrate the contemporary applicability of the *Diamond Sūtra*'s liberating path.

4.1 Background Analysis of Suffering (*duḥkha*)

This case includes the contemporary prisoner who has been in prison for eighteen years, with a life sentence remaining possibly. He has no contact with family or friends, possesses no

materials, and lives in a shared room of two hundred prisoners. Enduring bright light and sounds of snoring, sweeping, moaning, shouting in a nightmare, and teeth grinding from the inmates nightly is an endless torment to him.[117] It is also the case of the prisoner who was falsely accused of horse rustling in the Dali period and doing nothing except reciting the *Diamond Sūtra* even during the torture interrogation.[118] Furthermore, this is also the case for those who are captured into prisons upon their failure in a fight for their beliefs, for the independence of their people, for the power of their nation, and for whatever conventional ideals in this conditioned world over time. In short, despite the wide range of prior background and past causal behaviors, this thesis only discusses their present, equal adverse conditions – being limited in time, space, materials, and external help.

4.2 The Root Causes (*samudaya*): Attachments in Feelings and Perceptions

From mundane perspective, none of them had ever lived in such a constraint condition with such limited resources despite of prior background. Moreover, what they suddenly lose is not only a past golden age with comfortable living environment but also the desired social bonding with acquainted people. Meanwhile, the fundamental need of belonging influences human cognitions, emotions, and behaviors, and its deprivation leads to emotional distress.[119]

From the lens of dependent origination taught by the Buddha approximately twenty five centuries ago, emotional distress and feelings of being tormented by external lights and sounds are phenomena conditioned by contact between six sense faculties – eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind and six corresponding perceptual fields – form, sound, scent, taste, touch, and objects

[117] This is the situation of the prisoner who gave the analogy between his situation and that of people in a traffic jam in Lancaster, *Buddhist Encounters: Finding a Home in the Human Condition*, 7.
[118] Harrison, "Resetting the Diamond: Reflections on Kumārajīva's Chinese Translation of the Vajracchedikā."
[119] Baumeister and Leary, "The Need to Belong."

of mind. According to the Buddha's teachings in The Great Cause Sūtra (MA 97, *Mahānidānasūtra*),[120] corresponding to DN 15 in the Nikāya,[121] a feeling, regardless of pleasant, painful, or neutral type, is impermanent, causing suffering, subject to destruction, and ceasing; thus, feeling should not be considered self or subject to self. Yet, due to the fixity in considering feeling as self or subject to self, the perception of hoping or fearing what was perceived as permanent manifests, entailing suffering. Vasubandhu explicates that attachments to pleasure and views are two cause roots of disputes, while feelings and perceptions are their corresponding conditions for these types of disputes to transmigrate.[122]

Consequently, due to the pleasant feelings arising from hearing the joyful sounds and visualizing the dark room nightly and acquainted people daily, these prisoners hoped such feelings would be fixed, unique, and permanent. Thus, they suffer upon the vanishing of these desired objects. Additionally, the obsession with the perception of the seemingly endless, turbulent nightly sound and harsh hue rouses their internal conflicts in the present.

4.3 Cessation (*nirodha*): Alternative Solutions

People pursue what they want, ask for help if possible, and fight for the desired with all available means in case of conflicts. In a prison, all such external supports are extremely limited. Besides rare helps from visiting chaplaincies, these people can only try calm themselves for each moment. Yet is it easy for people to calm themselves amid such a chaotic environment, where each person is both the subject of suffering and the subject of generating phenomena that negatively impact others?

[120] Thich Tue Sy, *Trung A-Hàm (Madhyamāgama)*, 2009, 2:903–4.
[121] Bhikkhu Sujato, *Long Discourses: A Faithful Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, 2:59–60.
[122] Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhaṣyam*, 2012, 1:133; Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, 1991, 1:81.

If it was that simple, the Buddha would not assert that because of not penetrating dependent origination, those beings intertwined like a tangled loom and could not exit from saṁsāra (MA 97; DN 15).[123] Vasubandhu explained that those who desires to see the Truths needs to observe precepts (*śīla*) and sequentially cultivate wisdom from teaching (*śrutamayī prajñā*), wisdom from reflection (*cintāmayī prajñā*), and wisdom from practice (*bhāvanāmayī prajñā*). Then after separating themselves from crowds and unwholesome thoughts, those who are impacted by selectiveness (*vitarkacarita*) can practice mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasmṛta*) to cut off imagination.[124] Indeed, mindfulness of breathing is a foundational teaching that the Buddha guided the bhikṣus to practice concentration in a quiet places such as a forest or an abandoned house and cultivate the true understanding (MA 81, The Discourse on Mindfulness of the Body; MN 10, Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta).[125]

Nowadays, mindfulness of breathing becomes a well-known meditation technique in retreat centers. Yet, despite of the Buddha time or modern time, three prerequisites to practice mindfulness of breathing, especially for the novice, are a quiet environment, time, and mutual support from wholesome companions (*kalyāṇamitra*). However, these requirements are indeed unrealistic in prisons. Even when practitioners can stand in the mindfulness of breathing intermittently, it is hard to tame minds amid myriad distraction by countless conditioned phenomena.

[123] Thich Tue Sy, *Trung A-Hàm (Madhyamāgama)*, 2009, 2:894; Bhikkhu Sujato, *Long Discourses: A Faithful Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, 2:46.
[124] Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, 1991, 3:911–17; Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhaṣyam*, 2012, 4:316–23.
[125] Thich Tue Sy, *Trung A-Hàm (Madhyamāgama)*, 2009, 1:757; Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*, 145–46.

4.4 The Non-abiding Path (*mārga*) in Praxis

Based on the guided non-abiding path taught in the *Diamond Sūtra*, this section aligns practitioners with their current situation and developmental needs along the gradual path to the suchness in the phenomenon-driven stream of mental factors. The author finds that flow is congruent with what Vasubandhu explains about twelve sense bases (*āyatana*), consisting of six sense faculties–eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind (*manas*) and six fields–forms, sounds, smell, taste, touch, and objects of mind (*dharma*), that an *āyatana* is the gate of entering or arising of mind and mental factors and their extended effects.[126] Among these factors, there must be critical ones, on dependence of those, a single thought of prajñā manifests and motivates a suffering being to set out the path of bodhisattva.

This thesis analyzes how the flow of mind (citta) and its associated mental factors function upon encountering the *Diamond Sūtra*, using the operation of the consciousness aggregate (*vijñānaskandha*). According to the Buddha's teachings on seven cases and three kinds of insights (SA 42),[127] corresponding to SN 22.57 in the Nikāya,[128] the consciousness aggregate consists of six types of consciousness—visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental consciousnesses (*manovijñāna*)—each arising in dependence on name-and-form. Vasubandhu expounds that consciousness is the awareness of six fields.[129] For the first five fields, through a sensory-based faculty, the perceived external stimuli from the corresponding field are differentiated by the corresponding consciousness. Yet the sixth tuple of faculty, field, and consciousness is more complex. There is no sensory-based faculty for mind (*manas*) and the

[126] Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhaṣyam*, 2012, 1:127–28; Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, 1991, 1:78.
[127] Guṇabhadra, "Saṃyuktāgama," 0010.
[128] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 899–900.
[129] Translated by the author from Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhaṣyam*, 2012, 1:118.

objects of mind are not external stimuli but mental factors. In short, twelve sense bases and six consciousnesses constitute the eighteen elements (*dhātu*), where all conditioned phenomena are included.[130]

Following the stream of mental factors that arise in twelve āyatanas when perceiving phenomena occurring in the eighteen dhātus, the thesis proposes and illustrates a three-stage framework of practicing including (1) developing of serene faith from foundational teaching and daily life experience, (2) transforming craving and suffering in the nadir of suffering by discernment, and (3) transcending by practice giving from abiding to non-abiding. However, strictly speaking, a three-stage framework is only proposed from a scholastic perspective. From the lens of practicing the *Diamond Sūtra*, it is an inherent progress that consecutively manifests from the stream of mental factors as illustrated below.

4.4.1 First Stage: Serene Faith Arising in the Torrent of Dependent Origination

Upon what conditions can a person set out on the bodhisattva path, holding the great vow to liberate all sentient beings? If not experiencing deep suffering—beyond the endurance of an individual or even a group, one cannot truly grasp the immensity of *duḥkha* experienced by countless beings across time. In the face of extreme adversity, a practitioner may, in brief moments of clarity, discern two pivotal truths while observing intrapersonal and interpersonal phenomena shaped by dependent origination.

The first is the recognition of the value of a fleeting wholesome deed performed by an unfamiliar individual—someone not within the habitual bounds of the fixed self. Though such an act may flash by like lightning, it can illuminate the darkness of ignorance and ignite the light of hope. Thus, serene faith (*śraddhā*) in the pure essence hidden in each person may arise—not

[130] Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, 1991, 1:76.

through reliance on any one individual, but through the immeasurable convergence of discrete wholesome deeds performed by countless unacquainted beings.

Second, under the overwhelming torrent of impermanence, the perceptions of a fixed self, others, and the boundary between them begin to dissolve. What remains in such moments is a singular concern for the afflicted—for those undergoing similar suffering. When these two realizations converge, an ordinary person may come to believe in the existence of a pure essence concealed beneath the diverse and conditioned behaviors of beings unknowingly immersed in the rhythmic flow of saṁsāra and constantly generating its causes of suffering. From this recognition, the wholesome desire (*chanda*) to seek a liberating path for all sentient beings arises in the mind of the newly awakened individual.

From mundane perspective, the manifestation of such a spiritual decision can be practically reasoned by psychological studies. Experimental studies show positive reappraisal of a situation as a potential strategy to alleviate its emotional impact.[131] Thus, it is possible for prisoners to re-evaluate the current situation and the people who share common experiences. Thinking broad about the impermanent nature of surrounding phenomena and thinking of the shared suffering caused by the conditioned that impacting all beings are ways to untighten the fixity in the unpleasant feelings in prison. Additionally, psychological study on the need to belonging for motivation also proves that "people form social bonds readily, even under seemingly adverse conditions," especially those who share common experiences.[132] Hence, positive reappraisal and the need of belonging can drive prisoners to observe and gradually discovered the hidden pure essence in other inmates.

[131] Aldao and Nolen-Hoeksema, "Specificity of Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies."
[132] Baumeister and Leary, "The Need to Belong," 520.

However, can clarity arise in all who face adversity? For instance, why do some people commit suicide amid adversity? This counter question itself consolidates what the author claims in the discussion about the semantic structure of the *Diamond Sūtra* that each sūtra targets the audience of particular extant skills and faculty. Such doubts reveal the lack of foundational Dharmas to enter the guided path in this sūtra. Logically, adversity is a necessary condition for a thought of clarity with appreciative discrimination, in which a sattva decides to depart on the bodhisattva path. Yet, the prior premise of that necessary condition is the learned persons, who has already attained some wisdom arising from the teaching (*śrutamayī prajñā*) about the Four Noble Truths and the law of dependent origination.

Additionally, adversity is a realistic environment for practitioners to initiate and cultivate serene faith (*śraddhā)* in two aspects: (1) the pure essence of living beings and (2) the eclipse of the boundary between self and living beings to the torrent of dependent origination. Therefore, adversity is a sufficient condition for their later decision on the bodhisattva path, among many liberating paths, to exit the conditioned world and reach the unconditioned altogether with all beings.

4.4.2 Second Stage: Transforming Suffering to Wisdom by a Thought of Discernment

The *Diamond Sūtra* teaches bodhisattvas the non-abiding path. Yet where does the solemn vow of a bodhisattva initially take place? Not in a spiritual ceremony surrounded by hundreds or thousands of venerable monks and nuns and noble laypersons although the verbal vow can be later declared there. The solemn vow indeed initiates in a living hell, right at the twelve *āyatanas* (sense bases).

4.4.2.1 Stream of mind arisen at the twelve āyatanas

In particular, upon the contact between ear and sounds, auditory consciousness arises and discriminate the perceived auditory experience. The tuple of ear, sound, and auditory consciousness is the condition for the contact mental factor of *manas* (mind faculty) manifests,[133] along with other four universal mental factors of manas, including attention (*manasikāra*), feeling, perception, and volition (*cetanā*). The attention causes mind to focus on the experience, the feeling mental factor causes a feeling experience, perception grasps the distinguished attributes of the experience, and volition propels the mind on either positive or negative.[134] Manas and those mental factors are conditions for mind consciousness manifests.

In a favorable living condition, that is how a sound, such as a sound of a melody, passing through the gates of ear and manas, causes the manifestation of the gratification of mind consciousness and gratification of feeling. On the dependence of such gratification of feeling, the desire of an auditory experience of similar attributes arises in manas. In an adverse condition, such as in a shared prison, the experience from a present sound, such as sounds of snoring, sweeping, moaning, shouting in a nightmare, and teeth grinding from the inmates, is clearly distinguished against the past desired experience, classified as a negative mental event, and causing anger, worry, indignation, resentment and other minor mind factors of upset consequently. Then on the dependence of the desire of a past experience through five sensory bases, selectiveness and discursiveness arise in manas. Yet, all past joyful mundane experience just discriminates against the present adverse experience and magnify the negative energy.

[133] Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhaṣyam*, 2012, 1:279; Thich Tue Sy, *A-tì-đạt-ma Pháp Uẩn Túc Luận Abhidharma-Dharmaskandhaśāstra*, 440.
[134] Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhaṣyam*, 2012, 1:279–80.

4.4.2.2 Hearing a phrase of Diamond Sūtra in the living hell

Amid such countless chaotic sounds and irritating external objects, what happens to a prisoner who is hopelessly immersed in the flux of accumulated anger upon "hearing" the following phrase of *Diamond Sūtra*, echoed from the living hell, teaching "not to abide anywhere – not to abide on forms, sounds, scents, tastes, touchable, or mind-objects"?[135]

A mental factor of prajñā arises in the mind of the practitioner. Why? It is because that verse is the direct solution for the situation without inferencing or reasoning. In that moment, that mental factor of prajñā, like "a collider beam of discernment,"[136] radiates all eighteen dhātus, smashes out all tangling experiences originated from craving and grasping to neutral energy packets. Those energy packets resonate to a sufficiently large source of energy to sustain a stream of discernment, where the first thought of truly understanding the essence of the Sūtra manifests.

In the stream of manifested discernment (*prajñā*), there are other four particular mental factors of concentration (*samādhi*), inspection (*smṛti*), interest (*chanda*), and intensified interest (*abhimokṣa*) in manas,[137] objecting to the verses in the Sūtra amid the living hell. Because of concentration, the practitioner can pay full attention to the verses. Inspection supports recollecting prior *śrutamayī prajñā* (wisdom from teaching), *cintāmayī prajñā* (wisdom from reflection), and all present phenomena and juxtapose those with the verses to truly understand their meanings. With discernment, he can appreciatively discriminate phenomena.

[135] Refer to the prior section on the Summary of the Diamond Sūtra, śloka §4
[136] Goodman, *The Buddhist Psychology of Awakening*, 104.
[137] Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhaṣyam*, 2012, 1:279–80.

4.4.2.3 A thought of serenity

Understand what? The practitioner understands that clinging to anything is the most afflicting perception in this conditioned world because there is no permanent object to hold and even no independent, autonomous subject to conduct the action of grasping. Thus, manifests in his mind the pure desire (*chanda*) of the unconditioned and an exit from the endless saṁsāra fueled by dependent origination.

Therefore, he ponders and understands that practicing giving is an antidote to grasping but not the reciprocal or subjective giving that he has been used to. Both reciprocal and subjective giving is a variance of grasping. The former attaches to the expectation of returning an equivalent favor to his fixed self. The latter limits receivers within those who have a binding with a fixed self, such as his family, relatives, friends, community, country, ethnicity, and species. In short, the antidote to grasping is not giving with attachment to conditioned objects, whose presence causes allure and absence causes affliction. Realizing thus, the practitioner understand why "giving should be offered by a bodhisattva without abiding on any object—without abiding on forms, sounds, scents, tastes, touchable, or mind-objects."[138]

The practitioner understands that due to the discrimination between self and others, he feels only his affliction but not the deep fears in other inmates. The deep fears that all prisoners try to overcome and are uncontrollably revealed in nightmares through the disturbing sound of creams. He finds no clear boundary between subjects and objects in a prison room, a closed ecosystem, and a conditioned world fueled by dependent origination because he himself is tormented by the sounds generated by other inmates but also disturbing others by similar noises during sleeping. Without the fixed boundary between self and others, he does not only see the

[138] Summary of the Diamond Sūtra, śloka §4

bravery in these inmates but also can recollect their discrete wholesome deeds from his past experience despite of their exposed behaviors. That overall inspection consolidates the serene faith in the pure essence of beings in his serene mind. Accordingly, he understands why "the Tathāgata must be seen through non-mark among marks."[139]

Because of believing in the pure essence in each being and recognizing the overshadowed boundary between self and living beings amid the torrent of dependent origination, the intensified interest in the bodhisattva path arises. In the stream of pure discernment with inspection, the practitioner raises the thought that "all sentient beings must be completely liberated by me to Nirvāṇa."[140] Such thought arises because the practitioner decides to depart on the liberating path toward the unconditioned together with all other suffering beings. Because of realizing no clear boundary between objects and subjects of liberating on the path against the turbulent torrent of dependent origination but only the impacted, the practitioner sees living beings as inseparable wholesome companions (*kalyāṇamitra*). Ever having experienced the radiance of wisdom and compassion from the pure essence of many unacquainted, he realizes that only the resonated wisdom from all beings is sufficiently powerful to exit dependent origination and attain the perfection of wisdom. Thus, the practitioners understand why it is taught in the *Diamond Sūtra* that "although countless beings are completely liberated, no being is completely liberated."[141]

In other words, the "serenity even in a single thought"[142] is not a miracle but a moment where manas is purely filled with five particular mental factors of wisdom, concentration, inspection, interest, and intensified interest. Such serene mental stream manifests in a

[139] Ibid., śloka §5
[140] Ibid., śloka §3
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid., śloka §6

practitioner who has learned foundational Dharmas, searched for a liberating path in an adverse environment, and recalled the sūtra verse that is directly applicable to his present adversity. Accordingly, the practitioner can recollect all past and present experiences to an intensive collider beam of wisdom to fathom the essence of the sūtra in that serene moment. Realizing the clear contrast between serenity and the endless affliction hidden in the gratification of consciousness arisen at the twelve sense bases, the practitioner decides to set out on the non-abiding path together with all living beings.

In short, without experiencing suffering in adversity, who can be awakened from the bittersweet dreams of desire? Without being immersed in the living hell with all beings, where there is nowhere to abide for not suffering, how can a practitioner raise the solemn vow of taking the non-abiding path in the accompany of all living beings?

4.4.3 Third Stage: Transcend by Giving Fearlessness from Abiding to Non-abiding

What can those who possess no materials in a confined prison give for the practice of non-abiding giving? Among three types of giving expounded by Vasubandhu,[143] the practitioner can practice giving what all afflicted prisoners need most in this particular case: fearlessness and Dharma. To give fearlessness, the practitioner needs to practice encountering fears. To convey Dharma, he needs to understand Dharma truly. Thus, to fulfill any non-abiding giving, the practitioner first learns to encounter each phenomenon through analytical insights to see the essence concealed by various polymorphisms.

With accumulated discernment and the essential meanings of the sūtra in mind, he practices the habit of appreciatively discriminating to find the essence of each conditioned phenomenon arising in the constrained living condition and realize the root cause of fear is

[143] Vasubandhu, “Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitāsūtraśāstra,” 0318b.

grasping. Therefore, through the practice of giving fearlessness when confronting conditioned phenomena, a practitioner aims toward two unconditioned dharmas: (1) analytical cessation (*pratisaṁkhyānirodha*) cultivated through wisdom from appreciatively discriminating and (2) non-analytical cessation (*apratisaṁkhyānirodha*), where never manifest defilements due to the complete absence of conditions,[144] asymptotic by transcending non-analytical cessation. The non-analytical cessation is the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) mentioned in the *Diamond Sūtra*.

4.4.3.1 Abide to transcend

Although there is a long path of practicing for a novice bodhisattva to form the non-analytical giving habit with no perception of a self, a sentient being, a life, a person, Dharma, or non-Dharma as great bodhisattvas, the sub-goals and means are included in the second round of teaching in the *Diamond Sūtra*. The simile of the raft is recalled in the *Diamond Sūtra* with two points: (1) an object (dharma) can be used as a raft to across the river and (2) those who reached the river bank should leave the raft behind.[145] Thus, along the non-abiding path toward the unconditioned, practitioners can rely on conditioned means, such as perceptions of self, beings, and Dharma to transcend them.

As being analyzed in the previous sub-sections, based on the so-called self, a practitioner experiences the escalating affliction caused from craving and grasping. Abiding on fears of sounds, he transcends fears amid adversity. Based on living beings, he observes the impact of universal law of dependent origination to all conditioned phenomena and desires to cease the torrent of suffering completely. In the twelve *āyatanas*, he abides on the boundary between

[144] Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhaṣyam*, 2012, 1:92–93.
[145] Summary of the Diamond Sūtra, śloka §6

internal sense bases and external sense bases to realize the eclipse of boundary between self and beings. Thus, inspecting intermittent wholesome deeds exposed from a random person who regularly behave at various standards, the novice practitioner abides on the accumulated pure essence of all beings to practice giving fearlessness sustainably.

4.4.3.2 Giving fearlessness

In a chaotic living environment, if a practitioner, relying on Dharma, encounters all surrounding events as conditioned phenomena, which arise and fade, without any behavior driven by mental factors of anger, worry, indignation, or resentment, he is fearless. Having experienced fears manifested in mind on the dependence of the sounds exposed from inmates due to fears, a nightmare scream as an example, he knows his fears will stimulate and escalate fears in the minds of others. Knowing thus, he gives fearlessness by not exposing behaviors driven by fears but recognizing the fear itself and analytically contemplating it with a beam of discernment. By exposing composure amid adversity, the practitioner does not worsen the situation and also transmit his equanimity energy to surrounding people, and that is how he abides on fears to practice non-abiding giving fearlessness.

4.4.3.3 Giving Dharma

From the lens of scientific, humans can learn and imitate by watching positive outcomes from other people's behaviors. Vicarious reinforcement learning is no longer a social learning theory but is applied to implement neural network models in machine learning.[146] In this case, the trained practitioner encounter fears with composure due to his direct experience on the true nature of phenomena. The untrained inmates do not understand that the true nature of the

[146] Bandura, *Social Learning Theory*; Collette et al., "Neural Computations Underlying Inverse Reinforcement Learning in the Human Brain."

conditioned phenomena is impermanent, dependent, causing suffering, and illusory. Yet, by feeling the energy of equanimity and observing the composure radiated from the trained practitioner, they mimic his behaviors. Consequently, the accumulated negative energy in the shared ecosystem is positively transformed, and fears are temporarily alleviated in all minds. Due to experiencing calm directly, these inmates tends to repeat this efficient habit when encountering chaotic. In other words, by giving fearlessness, the practitioner also gives speechless teachings about Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Mindfulness without any perception of a self, sentient beings, or Dharma in his mind.

4.4.4 The Path vs. Perceptions of Bodhisattva, Sattva, and Kalyāṇamitra

In the long term, what occurs in the prison room where there is a true practitioner of the *Diamond Sūtra*? The darkness of fears and defilements is gradually outshined by the light radiated from the resonance of prajñā of all beings in that room. Under that ubiquitous bright light, the practitioner recognizes the pure essence of beings to a deeper extent. Recognizing this, he further settles the initial serene faith, practices giving, and cultivates pure wisdom from the accumulated prajñā. There, perceptions of *bodhisattva*, *sattva*, and *kalyāṇamitra* are solely vague naming conventions of the conditioned world, and only the non-abiding undefiled path toward the unconditioned is present. That path departs from the pure essence hidden in the appearance of a prison, transcends eighteen dhātus by the prajñā parāmitā, and aims toward the Suchness.

4.5 Lessons for All Practitioners

In summary, understanding and practicing the teachings in the *Diamond Sūtra* is challenging. It is so unfathomable that a practitioner can only be awakened by the meaning of a short verse about non-abiding amid adversity when experiencing overwhelmed suffering in a

confined living condition and finding nowhere to abide. Its practice is so challenging that a practitioner cannot sustainably follow without the accompany of all beings.

Yet among those whose minds are full of perceptions of a fixed self and others continuously manifest, who is not living in a confined space with conflicted resources? If people are satisfied with a private room, a house, a nation, or whatever they possess, how can disputes and even wars occur? Restlessly pursuing countless desires, people overlook the subtle changes in surrounding phenomena and falsely believe that there is a fixed self who is born to pursue happiness and that the seemingly continuous stream of happy moments is permanent and subjective to the fixed self. Only when changes of the conditioned are suddenly magnified, people can realize the abrupt changes and perceive changes as hardship, bereavement, and adversity.

Who will never encounter those severe vicissitudes of life? Who will not encounter irreversible losses in this world, where whoever is born must die and whatever manifests must fade away? Thus, is there any difference between these prisoners and those who live beyond the prison? Hence, it is necessary to clarify what the *Diamond Sūtra* phrase echoed from the living hell, aforementioned in the case analysis, is. It can be echoed from the past auditory experience or from the external sound presently chanted by someone else. However, if an ordinary person had never learnt and contemplated two foundational teachings of the Four Noble Truths and dependent origination, such auditory experience would not have been a condition for an ontological shift in mind.

This case analysis closes with the composure exposed by those who possess no materials, receive no external support, and live in constrained conditions. That composure was realistically exemplified by the contemporary prisoner deeply meditating prisoner amid the chaotic sounds in

a confined prison room and the ancient prisoner concentrating on chanting the *Diamond Sūtra* in torture interrogation as aforementioned in the background analysis of the case. Supposing that there is no pure essence in each living being, where does such serenity originate?

Finally, although underscoring the practice of giving fearlessness and Dharma in adversity, the author does not refute the values of materials, powers, and fames in this mundane world. They are accessible means for possessors to conduct a wide range of wholesome deeds daily. Whenever a person gives anything without any idea of a giver, a receiver, or the deed of giving, that person presently breaks the link of grasping arising from desire and brightens the world with a beam of pure wisdom as a true practitioner of the *Diamond Sūtra*.

5 Chapter 5: Conclusion

Having applied the essential teachings of the *Diamond Sūtra* to a real-world case of adversity in the previous chapter, this final chapter draws together the major findings of the study. It reviews how the research questions have been addressed through textual analysis, interpretive inquiry, and practical case application. It also reflects on the strengths and limitations of the study's methodology and scope, and proposes future directions for further research. In doing so, it reaffirms the enduring relevance of the *Diamond Sūtra*'s liberating path for contemporary practitioners seeking wisdom and transformation amid the conditions of modern life.

5.1 Findings

5.1.1 The Role of Paths

The significance of faithfully following a path is critical to Buddhist practitioners. In *The Buddhist Psychology of Awakening,* Goodman recalls the Tibetan Buddhist warning about "old-dog practitioners"—whose outward display of Dharma proficiency deceives both themselves and others due to deep-seated delusion.[147] He asserts the need for reliable tools of self-monitoring to ensure that practitioners remain genuinely aligned with the liberating path, rather than becoming lost in performative appearances. Goodman also raises the classic riddle that has prompted extensive debate in Buddhist philosophy: How can a human cause the unconditioned, which by nature is uncaused?[148] According to Abhidharma, among all conditioned phenomena, only the Path—the true path leading to the unconditioned—is pure. The Path and the unconditioned are

[147] Goodman, *The Buddhist Psychology of Awakening*, 14–15.
[148] Ibid., 46.

undefiled because defilements do not cultivate in them.[149] Therefore, a liberating path is the only means for human to depart from the conditioned world toward the unconditioned.

Recognizing the role of paths, this thesis has examined three inseparable paths through the study of the *Diamond Sūtra*: the intellectual path of establishing an authentic textual foundation in Chapter 2, the path of realization, centered on cultivating the perfection of wisdom through textual and philosophical analysis in relation to praxis in Chapter 3, and the bodhisattva path in praxis in Chapter 4. Each of these paths is indispensable. Without the initial step of textual authentication, the pursuit of understanding cannot begin. Without realized practitioners who embody the teachings, there are no reliable models to emulate. And if contemporary people do not continue traversing the path in praxis, the transmission of the Sūtra may dissolve under the weight of distraction and delusion.

Historical continuity exemplifies the significance of the multiple paths explored in this study. Because Kumārajīva rendered the first Chinese translation of the *Diamond Sūtra* in 401 CE, Chinese Saṅgha and scholars were subsequently able to engage deeply with its teachings — leading to subsequent interpretations, revisions, and the influential commentary of Vasubandhu translated by Bodhiruci in the 6th century. Likewise, modern scholars such as Max Müller and Edward Conze reconstructed and translated the Sanskrit text of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*, providing critical foundations for continued scholarship. Each of these efforts represents a cumulative step in the transmission and understanding of the *Diamond Sūtra*.

Building on these foundations, this thesis produced in Chapter 2 a concise summary of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, preserving its traditional thirty-two chapter structure and key phrases as a referential basis for further doctrinal and practical analysis. From this close

[149] Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhaṣyam*, 2012, 1:89–90.

reading, the study identified the sūtra's internal semantic structure—comprising three pedagogical rounds:

Building on these foundations, this study produced a concise summary of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* in Chapter 2, preserving its traditional thirty-two chapter structure and retaining key phrases and verses to serve as a referential basis for both doctrinal analysis and practical application. Accordingly, the study discovered the semantic structure of three rounds of teachings in the *Diamond Sūtra*: (1) expounding the mind-training path (§1–5), (2) motivating to practice (§6), and (3) realization (§7–32). In so doing, it also located the sūtra's doctrinal grounding in the law of dependent origination, thereby establishing both a practical starting point for practitioners and a point of continuity with Early Buddhist teachings.

Focusing on the first round of teaching in the *Diamond Sūtra* concerning the mind-training path (§1–5), this study investigated the essence, uniqueness, and contemporary applicability of the sūtra's liberating path in response to the first three research questions, particularly from the perspective of experiential practice rather than abstract conceptual analysis (Chapter 3). The analysis yielded the following responses to the first three research questions:

- **Question 1**: The core teaching of the *Diamond Sūtra* lies in training the mind to move from attachment to conditioned phenomena toward the direct realization of suchness. This process begins with a pure aspiration to liberate all beings, grounded in faith in the shared true essence of all sentient beings. Through the practice of non-abiding giving, one cultivates experiential discernment of this essence, thereby progressing toward the perfection of wisdom, which opens the path to unconditioned realization.
- **Question 2**: The uniqueness of the *Diamond Sūtra* resides in its transcendence of abstract theorization, its consistent internal logic centered on essence rather than form, and its

presentation of a practical, accessible path—through non-abiding giving—for cultivating wisdom without attachment to any object of the six sense fields or to conceptual perception itself.

- **Question 3**: Elder Subhūti's concern for the "serene faith" of future beings remains highly relevant in the modern context. Pure faith—rooted in experiential insight rather than conceptual belief—has become increasingly rare, underscoring its critical importance for realizing the sūtra's transformative path.

5.1.2 Responses to Research Questions 4

- **Question 4**: How can the non-abiding liberating path outlined in the *Diamond Sūtra* be sustainably pursued in the chaotic contemporary life?

This question, which originated from Elder Subhūti's concern, has been a central focus of study through the case analysis of adversity in Chapter 4. Even in contemporary life, the non-abiding path taught in the *Diamond Sūtra* can be initiated amid adversity, which serves as a powerful condition for awakening. The case analysis of prisoners illustrates that extreme suffering—such as deprivation, isolation, and interpersonal conflict—can create the conditions for a single thought of serenity to arise. Rather than requiring a quiet environment for meditation, this path begins in harsh realities, when a practitioner comes to recognize the inner value of beings and the relentless momentum of dependent origination, vividly displayed through the cumulative manifestation of suffering conditioned by craving and grasping.

Therefore, the path to the perfection of wisdom originates from the first beam of true wisdom accumulated from the partial revelation of pure essence in each being amid adversity. Led by such initial serene faith in the true essence, an individual—finding the teaching of giving

without abiding in any conditioned phenomena as a direct antidote to craving and grasping—conducts compassionate action free from attachment and conceptual distinctions. The practitioner radiates the source of discerning energy to the surroundings, is reflected back by the brighter essence revealed in others, and resonates with the awakened essence in all to a stronger source of pure wisdom, which smashes delusion, craving, grasping, and other defilements in the conditioned world. Because of the inherent suffering in conditioned existence, practitioners of the *Diamond Sūtra* continue to awaken in the midst of conflict and hardship, transform suffering to wisdom, and transcend causes leading to defilements—alongside all living beings—regardless of time or place.

5.1.3 Responses to Research Questions 5

- **Question 5**: What role does the *Diamond Sūtra* play in the continuity of Buddhist teachings?

This question arises in Chapter 2 as part of a broader scholarly concern regarding the authenticity of the *Diamond Sūtra*, particularly due to the absence of its original Sanskrit text from the period of oral transmission. Rather than relying on archaeological evidence, this study engages with the question through a three-layered framework—textual analysis, doctrinal reflection, and practical application—developed across Chapters 2 through 4.

Although the study does not offer new historical findings, it demonstrates that the *Diamond Sūtra* is doctrinally consistent with early Buddhist teachings found in the Āgama and their corresponding counterparts in the Nikāya. It is grounded in core principles such as the Four Noble Truths, the law of dependent origination, and the characteristics of the conditioned

world—impermanence, non-self, and suffering—as well as the true essence, also referred as suchness in Mahāyāna, which cannot be grasped through fixed forms or attributes.

While this study does not analyze each element of the Eightfold Path in detail, it shows that the *Diamond Sūtra* does not diverge from it. Instead, the non-abiding path introduced in the sūtra reinforces the practitioner's ongoing engagement with the Eightfold Path, particularly through the practice of non-abiding giving—not limited to material giving, but extending to fearlessness and Dharma. As demonstrated in the case analysis in Chapter 4, this integration is not theoretical but lived.

In the Buddha's final teachings in The Final Journey (DA 2),[150] corresponding to DN 16 in the Nikāya,[151] it is taught that wherever the Eightfold Path is present, there is attainment of four fruits of the contemplative life (*śramaṇaphala*). The *Diamond Sūtra* not only aligns with this path but also advances it, particularly in its guidance of transcending these stages of realization in §9. Its emphasis on "not abiding anywhere" echoes early teachings on the cessation of craving and clinging for the cessation of suffering. Rather than proposing abstract metaphysical theories, the *Diamond Sūtra* offers a pragmatic, experiential path that is fully consistent with the Buddha's earliest aim: the cessation of suffering through wisdom and ethical conduct. In doing so, it not only upholds but evolves the liberating continuity of the early teachings through the recognition that no fixed self or boundary separates oneself from other living beings.

In a fast-changing, interdependent world where transient gratification offers no lasting refuge, the *Diamond Sūtra* serves as a timely and skillful means for contemporary practitioners to return to introspection, recognize the true essence, and embark on a path of self-liberation with

[150] Buddhayaśas and Fo-nien, "Dīrghāgama," 0025.
[151] Bhikkhu Sujato, *Long Discourses: A Faithful Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, 2:144.

all living beings as companions. Addressing this final research question affirms the sūtra's authenticity in practice, helping to ensure that those who suffer are not dissuaded from engaging with its liberating message due to lingering scholarly doubts.

5.2 Limitations

As aforementioned in the discussion on the three-round semantic structure of Chapter 2, this study concentrates on the praxis of the liberating guided in the essence of the Sūtra in the expounding round (§1–5) and examines the concern of Elder Subhūti in the round of motivating to practice (§6), and excludes the last round of realizing (§7–32). This decision was made to avoid overwhelming an unprepared readership with complex intellectual analysis of advanced spiritual states. Such realizations are typically verified only through direct meditative experience. While this scope provides clarity for focused analysis on practical application, it may limit insights for more advanced readers seeking engagement with the full text.

The critical limitation of this study lies in linguistic accessibility. Due to limited proficiency in Classical Chinese and European languages, this study could not engage deeply with many sources, particularly those originating during the formative period of Buddhism in China and during the colonial era. These language constraints have restricted the breadth of comparative insights into historical interpretations and transmission of the sūtra in the literature review section.

5.3 Strengths of the Study

The strength of this study lies in its methodologies and methodological coherence across all chapters. The integration of textual analysis, doctrinal interpretation, and practical application provided a layered, grounded investigation aligned with both Buddhist hermeneutics and

contemporary research standards. While emphasizing methodology, this study aligns the traditional Buddhist framework of the threefold wisdom (*śrutamayī, cintāmayī, bhāvanāmayī prajñā*) with the practical path of applying the teachings in the *Diamond Sūtra,* guiding practitioners toward the Perfection of Wisdom. By adhering to a clearly defined methodology, the study also provides a means for both scholars and practitioners to trace errors, incorporate feedback, and extend the inquiry in future research in the spirit of transforming and transcending delusion.

By moving beyond conceptual exposition, the study highlights the lived dimension of Buddhist liberation as intended in the *Diamond Sūtra*. Though aiming toward the ultimate Truth—the supramundane—it maintains a balance between traditional Buddhist study and interdisciplinary insights, thereby offering a holistic approach to understanding suffering and transformation.

5.4 Future Directions

This study opens several avenues for further exploration, particularly in light of the scope and limitations outlined in Chapter 1 and the preceding sections of this chapter. Future research could expand textual and doctrinal analysis to encompass the entire *Diamond Sūtra* in at least three key directions. First, deeper engagement with the round of motivating to practice (§6) could offer greater accessibility for modern practitioners, emphasizing skillful means applicable to daily life. Second, a focused inquiry into the round of realization (§7–32) could yield deeper insights into the stages of the bodhisattva path and the attainment of wisdom. Third, a study focused on the attainment and transcendence of the four fruits of the contemplative life (*śramaṇaphala*) as discussed in §9 could demonstrate how the bodhisattva's non-abiding path

remains fully aligned with the Eightfold Path. Such inquiry would also reinforce the fifth research question concerning the continuity of Buddhist teachings.

In conclusion, this study has traced the non-abiding liberating path outlined in the *Diamond Sūtra* through textual, doctrinal, and practical lenses, affirming both its continuity with early Buddhist teachings and its enduring relevance to contemporary life. All efforts in this study—*A Path from Dependent Origination to the Unconditioned in the Diamond Sūtra*—are directed toward a singular wholesome aspiration: that the *Diamond Sūtra* not be relegated to merely an ancient literary artifact to admire or a scripture to be ritually recited, but rather serve as a self-salvific means by which sincere practitioners may transcend adversity and illuminate the unconditioned world with a beam of pure wisdom, regardless of time or place.

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